

RENEWING THE UNITED STATES' COMMITMENT
TO ADDRESSING THE ROOT CAUSES OF
MIGRATION FROM CENTRAL AMERICA

HEARING
BEFORE THE
SUBCOMMITTEE ON
WESTERN HEMISPHERE, CIVILIAN SECURITY,
MIGRATION AND INTERNATIONAL ECONOMIC
POLICY
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RENEWING THE UNITED STATES' COMMIT- MENT TO ADDRESSING THE ROOT CAUSES OF MIGRATION FROM CENTRAL AMERICA

Wednesday, April 14, 2021

HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES,
SUBCOMMITTEE ON WESTERN HEMISPHERE,
CIVILIAN SECURITY, MIGRATION AND
INTERNATIONAL ECONOMIC POLICY
COMMITTEE ON FOREIGN AFFAIRS,
Washington, DC.

The subcommittee met, pursuant to notice, at 10:04 a.m., in room 2172, Rayburn House Office Building, Hon. Albio Sires (chairman of the subcommittee) presiding.

Mr. SIRES. Good morning, everyone. Thank you to our witnesses for being here today.

This hearing, entitled “Renewing the United States’ Commitment to Addressing the Root Causes of Migration from Central America” will come to order.

Without objection, the chair is authorized to declare a recess of the committee at any point, and all members will have 5 days to submit statements, extraneous material, and questions for the record, subject to the length limitation in the rules. To insert something into the record, email the document to the previously mentioned address and contact subcommittee staff.

As a reminder to members, staff and all other physically present in this room, per recent guidance from the Office of the Attending Physician, masks must be worn at all times during today’s hearing. Please sanitize your seating area. The chair views these measures as a safety issue, and, therefore, an important matter of order and decorum for this proceeding.

As a reminder to members joining remotely, please keep your video function on at all times, even when you are not recognized by the chair. Members are responsible for muting and unmuting themselves, and please remember to mute yourself after you finish speaking.

Consistent with House Res. 8 and the accompanying regulations, staff will only mute members and witnesses as appropriate when they are not under recognition to eliminate background noise.

I see that we have a quorum, and we will now recognize—I will now recognize myself for opening remarks.

While I am thrilled that we have two experienced witnesses with us to discuss how to strengthen U.S. policy and foreign assistance toward Central America, I believe our goal should be to ensure that every individual throughout Central America has the chance to achieve a life of dignity and opportunity in their home country.

Only—only then will we be able to solve the challenge of irregular migration.

I know from speaking with both of our witnesses that they come to this hearing with proposals for how to do this, but I am also eager to hear ideas from our members on what we can do better. To me, this is what the relationship between Congress and the executive branch should look like. We are here to work together on a bipartisan basis to achieve the best policy outcomes for the American people.

I have been working on this issue long enough to know that success in this effort will not be achieved overnight. It will take many years of sustained effort, and I applaud President Biden for sending a clear message at the start of this Administration that this issue is a priority and that he and Vice President Harris are ready to invest necessary time and resources to achieve real progress.

As we all know, this hearing comes at a moment when the border arrivals are once again on the rise. Our immigration system is in dire need of reform, but the purpose of today's hearing is to look south of the border at the issues that are forcing people to flee their homes.

My experience from traveling many times to the region is that most individuals who make the journey know that it is dangerous. They also know that it is unlikely that they will be granted entry into the United States, but they are so desperate to escape that they take the costly and dangerous trip anyway. Violence, impunity, inequality, and the impact of climate change are among the many push factors driving this trend.

Hurricane Eta and Iota hit Honduras, Guatemala, and Nicaragua extremely hard at the end of last year, impacting as many as 9 million people in Central America. In San Pedro Sula alone, hundreds of thousands of people were forced into temporary shelters after their homes were flooded.

This devastation is closely—is clearly contributing to the current wave of migration, and I welcomed the USAID announcement last week that it has deployed a disaster response team to address food insecurity and other humanitarian needs in the region.

I also urge the U.S. Government to prioritize Central America in future efforts to distribute excess vaccines and provide resources to help countries buy COVID-19 vaccine directly.

As the U.S. Government takes a longer term and more holistic approach to addressing migration, I believe that promoting democratic governance and human rights must be central. We need to tackle corruption. We saw progress in Guatemala and Honduras when the international community provided backing and protection to courageous domestic prosecutors.

The anti-corruption mission in Guatemala helped reduce homicides by 5 percent annually during the 10-year period in which it operated. It showed that reducing corruption directly advances all our other policy goals. Unfortunately, there are economic and political elites in these countries who will fight tooth and nail to protect the status quo.

In Honduras, after the international mission helped convict prominent officials like the former first lady, President Hernandez and the Honduras Congress fought back by ending its mandate and

pushing through a new criminal code to reduce corruption sentences. In Guatemala, corrupt officials were emboldened after they ended the mandate of CICIG.

Now they are trying to hijack back the judicial selection process and capture the Constitutional Court. We cannot respond to these setbacks by throwing our arms in the air. We should redouble our support for those investigating and prosecuting high level corruption. That is why I included language in the Northern Triangle Enhanced Engagement Act, which was led by former Chairman Engel and Ranking Member McCaul—and it was passed into law last year—to sanction officials who obstruct corruption investigations or seek to harass or intimidate anti-corruption investigations.

We also need to support local civil society organizations; in general, the U.S. assistance to support bottom-up solutions that are driven by local leaders. The Inter-American Foundation provides one excellent model of this kind of work.

We must also reinforce our foreign assistance with strategic diplomacy. Ambassador Popp is doing a great job in Guatemala. We urgently need Senate-confirmed Ambassadors like him in El Salvador and Honduras, who are deeply committed to combating corruption and protecting human rights.

Expanding a lawful pathway for Central Americans to work in the United States, particularly through the H-2 visa program, should also be part of our regional strategy.

I will close my remarks by addressing an issue that threatens to undermine our efforts to engage constructively with countries in Central America. In recent weeks, Salvadorian government officials have attempted to discredit individual members of the U.S. Congress or to use disinformation to misrepresent individual members' views.

Unfortunately, this campaign to manipulate public perception has been supported by millions of dollars in payment to U.S. lobbyists. Members of Congress are receiving death threats and harassment as a result, including this chairman here. Members of Congress are receiving death threats and harassment.

Recently, it escalated to the point where El Salvador head of State urged a Member of Congress' constituents to vote her out of office and designated conspiracy theories supported by her political opponents. This is foreign election interference. If it continues, we will confront it as a national security threat to the United States.

During his short term in office, President Bukele has achieved a historic reduction in violent crimes. Maybe more important, he has given Salvadorans hope, and he deserves credit for that. But diplomacy is not a one-way street. Exposure to criticism is one of the burdens of leadership. Trust me, I have gotten plenty of it in my 15 years in Congress.

I have spent my time in Congress advocating for closer U.S. engagement with countries throughout Latin America and in the Caribbean because I care deeply about the people in this region, and I believe wholeheartedly in the capacity and the autonomy of the people in this region. I want to promote U.S. interests while lifting up our neighbors throughout the Western Hemisphere. This can only be done if we engage with one another in good faith about the issues where we agree and those where we see things differently.

Let's commit to fostering a culture of integrity, decency, and mutual respect. That is what all our constituents deserve.

Thank you, and I will now turn to Ranking Member Green for his opening statement.

Mr. GREEN. Thank you, Chairman Sires. And thank you to our witnesses. We are here to discuss the crisis of illegal migration from Central America and address its root causes. It is a timely topic, as President Biden caused the massive surge at the border, failed to understand how it happened, named the Vice President in charge, who has yet to visit the border, and failed to listen to members of his own Administration and party who actually seem to get it.

Unfortunately, there is no action other than a highly suspicious \$87 million hotel bill, \$350 a night per room, and as we saw yesterday, a 530 million no-bid contract, and I quote, "potentially worth more than 12 times the group's most recently reported annual budget, according to Axios."

But I would also like to report that there are members at the State Department with whom I have had conversations who do get it. You cannot just announce a 4 billion in cash payment, pass amnesty in the House, strike down all barriers, and when the rush to the border happens, expect people to believe it is Trump's fault. The Administration is literally hanging a welcome sign at our border, but many Democrats are actually acknowledging quietly to us that that is stupid, and that gives me hope.

You see, some of them recognize, like many of us, that there are three stages to migration. And if you would, consult the handout that I have provided at each of your seats.

First, this committee meeting is being held to mainly address those push factors that you see on the handout that I have shared, like improving the safety of people in their home countries and developing prosperity opportunities that make staying in their home country attractive. However, we should also reinstate path migration factors like recruiting the Mexican government to block its southern border, something the previous Administration did, as well as reinstating barriers to entry and asylum agreements which disincentivize illegal migration.

Since this hearing is primarily focused on push factors, I would like to share my vision to solve those issues. We have an opportunity to address them as well as other foreign policy crises in one fell swoop. Let me first summarize the problems. Economic opportunity in Latin America was severely disadvantaged by the commodity boom and corresponding rise in currency values caused by China's growth. It became cheaper for Latin Americans to buy Chinese goods. And as they did, they lost their own manufacturing base and the corresponding jobs. That is problem one.

China, on the other hand, gained those manufacturing jobs, creating a global dependency on that country that was on full display during the COVID crisis. That dependency is an issue for the United States, PPE, medications. Problem two.

The loss of opportunity in Latin America, as my handout displays, has created a substantial push for migration out of Latin America into our southern border. Problem three.

However, instead of just throwing more cash at the problem with no accountability, we should redirect existing dollars already appropriated for Latin America to incentivize companies to move manufacturing from China to Latin America, decrease our dependency on China, increase manufacturing and job opportunities for our brothers and sisters to the south, and decrease the push factors and pressure on our southern border.

This is a win-win-win. And I am working on legislation to this effect and hope to collaborate across the aisle with you, Mr. Chairman, on this.

In addition, I urge the Biden Administration to fully implement the bipartisan United States Northern Triangle Enhanced Engagement Act enacted in the last Congress. This legislation, as Chairman Sires said, sponsored by former Foreign Affairs Chairman Eliot Engel, addresses significant issues in Guatemala, Honduras, and El Salvador. Among other things, it requires the Secretary of State, heads of relevant agencies, to implement a 5-year strategy.

While there have been some improvements, there is still a lot of work to be done. And I urge the Biden Administration to stop rescinding asylum cooperative agreements that were enacted by the last Administration. The results of these policy reversals have been predictable.

Rather than requiring migrants to remain in Mexico and their home countries for their claims to be processed, we have created a refugee crisis in American facilities. The Biden Administration has gone so far as to offer Federal employees 4 months of paid leave to care for migrant children. This is unsustainable.

It is a public health emergency and humanitarian crisis. Migrants are risking their lives on the dangerous trek to the United States, and many are being violently and sexually exploited by human traffickers. Mind you, all of this during a global pandemic.

We do not have the strategy or the resources to deal with this. President Biden must show he is serious about ending this crisis. Open borders lead to disaster, but it isn't too late to reverse course. The Administration must do so immediately if we are to have any hope of stemming the flow of illegal immigration and the danger refugees face due to our open border process.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman, and I yield.

Mr. SIREs. Thank you, Ranking Member.

I now turn to the full chairman—the chairman of the full committee, Congressman Meeks, for opening statements.

Mr. MEEKS. Let me start by thanking my good friend and Chairman Albio Sires for inviting me to join you all here today. And I am thrilled to participate in such an important hearing held by this subcommittee.

As we look at the ongoing challenges both in Central America and at our own southern border, I believe that now is the time for an honest and frank conversation about our commitment and approach to addressing the root causes of migration. And while I am encouraged by some of the initial approaches taken by the Biden Administration, it may take years to recover from the damage done in Central America by the previous Administration.

The Trump Administration's reckless policies over suspending assistance and forcing Guatemala, El Salvador, and Honduras into

joining bilateral asylum cooperative agreements has been a major setback for the United States' credibility in the region. Now the heavy task of recuperating some of that goodwill falls on the Biden Administration, and it is up to us—it is up to us in Congress to play a proactive and supportive role.

The countries of Guatemala, El Salvador, and Honduras have long suffered from violence, corruption, and fractured economic growth. Severe drought experienced in what is known as the Dry Corridor has devastated communities, taken away jobs, and left people without food. The very real and present danger of climate change has brought on devastating hurricanes and natural disasters that are increasing in frequency and intensity.

For years, illegally armed gangs and drug traffickers have had a vice grip on the region, terrorizing women and children as well as extorting countless families and businesses.

And, finally, we know that these three countries are facing one of the highest levels of corruption in our region.

Given these underlying problems, it should be no surprise that so many Central Americans decide to take the incredibly dangerous journey in the hopes of a better life. The key challenges and drivers of migration in Central America cannot be addressed without serious and constant dialog between the United States and the governments of Guatemala, El Salvador, and Honduras.

And while we are—and we will continue to be—critical of some of those governments, we must try and find areas of common ground that we can work as partners together and explore our pathways for action. Rather than cutting assistance, we must explore ways to work around obstructive government and prioritize funding civil society partners, doing crucial work on the ground.

Now, more than ever, strong implementing partners are needed to help push the region to address countless crucial issues, like the debilitating impacts of COVID-19 pandemic, skyrocketing femicide rates, and to reignite anti-corruption and transparency initiatives.

At the same time, we also need to provide a space to listen to the most vulnerable in the region and help empower the voiceless. As Members of Congress, we must not be afraid to speak out against the numerous injustices that have taken place.

In Honduras, we must continue to call for justice for the Berta Caceras and Keyla Martinez and the Garifuna leaders who are missing in—who are still missing.

In Guatemala, we must support indigenous leaders defending their land and ensure that country has a transparent judicial system.

In El Salvador, we cannot stay quiet as women who seek abortion remain criminalized, and basic press freedoms are under attack.

So, in closing, again I would like to thank you, Chairman Sires and Ranking Member Green, for letting me participate and join you today. And I look forward to hearing the testimonies from Special Envoy Zuniga and Deputy Assistant Administrator Natiello.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman, and I yield back.

Mr. SIREs. I now turn to Ranking Member McCaul for his opening statement. Is he on?

[Off microphone comment]

Mr. SIREs. Okay. We will now—before we go to witnesses, I would like to take this opportunity to ask unanimous consent that Representatives Abigail Spanberger, Scott Perry, Sara Jacobs, and Ronny Jackson participate at today's hearing after all subcommittee members have had their opportunity to participate and question any witnesses.

No objection? Thank you.

We will now go to our witnesses. First, thank you very much for being here today. I will now introduce Mr. Ricardo Zuniga. He is President Biden's Special Envoy for the Northern Triangle at the U.S. Department of State, and a career member of the Senior Foreign Service.

Mr. Zuniga was previously the Interim Director of the Brazil Institute and a Senior Diplomatic Fellow at the Woodrow Wilson Center. His government assignments have included serving as U.S. Consul General in Brazil, Special Assistant to the President and Senior Director for Western Hemisphere Affairs at the National Security Council, and Political Counsel at the U.S. Embassy in Brazil.

Mr. Zuniga, thank you for being with us today, and we welcome you to our hearing.

We will then hear from Peter Natiello. He is the Deputy Assistant Administrator in the U.S. Agency for International Development's Latin America and Caribbean Bureau. Mr. Natiello has served as a USAID Mission Director in Afghanistan, El Salvador, Colombia, and Bolivia. He began his career with USAID in Bolivia, and he has also managed USAID democracy and governance programs in Ecuador.

Before joining the Foreign Service, Mr. Natiello served as a Peace Corps volunteer in Ecuador and as a Research Analyst with the Inter-American Development Bank. Mr. Natiello, thank you for joining us.

I ask each witness to please limit your testimony to 5 minutes. And without objection, your prepared statement will be made part of the record.

Mr. Zuniga, you are recognized for your testimony.

**STATEMENT OF RICHARD ZUNIGA, SPECIAL ENVOY FOR THE
NORTHERN TRIANGLE, U.S. DEPARTMENT OF STATE**

Mr. ZUNIGA. Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Thank you, Mr. Chairman, Ranking Member, and members of the House Foreign Affairs Subcommittee on the Western—

[Audio interruption]

Mr. SIREs. All right. You are recognized for 5 minutes.

Mr. ZUNIGA. Thank you. Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman, Ranking Member, and members of the House Foreign Affairs Subcommittee on the Western Hemisphere. Thank you for inviting me here today. I am honored to have this opportunity to speak with you and honored to serve as the State Department's Special Envoy to the Northern Triangle.

In my role as Special Envoy, my job is to advise the Secretary of State and oversee the Department's plan for a comprehensive approach to migration in North and Central America. To do that, I engage with governments in the region—Mexico, El Salvador, Honduras, and Guatemala, in particular—on a range of issues, and

my work is also much broader national effort defined by President Biden in his February 2d Executive Order creating a comprehensive regional framework on migration.

This approach includes a collaborative strategy for managing migration for North and Central America, for addressing the root causes of forced displacement and irregular migration over the long term. The Vice President leads this national effort, and the State Department supports and advances the objectives set by the Vice President and defined for U.S. agencies.

Since assuming this role on March 16, I have traveled with senior State Department and National Security Council officials to Mexico, Guatemala, and El Salvador, where we spoke with a wide variety of stakeholders. And here I want to emphasize our intent to engage the whole of society.

Just as all of U.S. society has a stake in the outcomes in Central America, so too does the whole of society in Central America. So on every visit, I met with members of civil society, the private sector, government of course, and other interested members, including media.

The message I am sharing is that the United States is committed to working with governments and all those who are—who share a common vision of a prosperous, secure, and democratic Central America. We do so while enforcing U.S. immigration laws, promoting safe, orderly, and humane migration and improving access to protection for those who need it.

Mr. Chairman, at this point, I think it is very clear to the United States and to the partners of the United States that the current episode of migration from Central America is part of a recurring pattern of mass migration driven by the push factors that have been defined earlier here today—insecurity, lack of opportunity, and, most of all, despair that lives are going to improve in Central America.

Our job—our very difficult job—as a government, working in consultation with Congress, working with the stakeholders I described earlier, is to find a way forward, first of all, to enforce our laws, enforce our borders, but also to demonstrate that there are other legal pathways that can be used by those seeking legal migration to the United States, and most of all, generating hope in Central America that they might have a better day and a reason to stay.

Right now, the logic, as you described it, is on the side of the push factors, aided by coyotes who are misrepresenting the conditions on the U.S. border, and suggesting that it is an easy path to arrive in the United States.

It is important to underscore here that people seeking safety, people seeking prosperity, people seeking justice, have a right to have all of those things in their countries. And we appreciate the recognition when that is provided by leaders in El Salvador, Honduras, and Guatemala about that right. Our work is to help generate enabling conditions that make that possible. That is difficult work; as you say, difficult work that will take many years to accomplish. But we have to begin somewhere, and we have to build on what has already been accomplished.

Mr. Chairman, thank you very much.

[The prepared statement of Mr. Zuniga follows:]

**Statement for the Record before the
United States House Foreign Affairs Committee
Subcommittee on Western Hemisphere, Civilian Security, Migration and International
Economic Policy
Hearing Title: Renewing the United States' Commitment to Addressing the Root Causes of
Migration from Central America
Ricardo Zúniga, Special Envoy for the Northern Triangle
April 14, 2021**

Introduction

Mr. Chairman, Ranking Member, and Members of the House Foreign Affairs Subcommittee on the Western Hemisphere -- thank you for inviting me here today. I am honored to have this opportunity to speak with you and honored to serve as the State Department's Special Envoy to the Northern Triangle. My role as Special Envoy is to advise the Secretary of State and oversee the Department's plan for a comprehensive approach to migration in North and Central America. To do that, I will engage with governments in the region -- including Mexico, El Salvador, Guatemala, and Honduras -- on a range of issues. My work is part of a much broader national effort defined by President Biden in his February 2 Executive Order creating a comprehensive regional framework on migration. This approach includes a collaborative strategy for managing migration throughout North and Central America and addressing root causes of forced displacement and irregular migration over the long term. The Vice President leads this national effort and the State Department supports and advances the objectives the Vice President defines for U.S. agencies.

Since assuming this role on March 16, I have traveled with senior State Department and National Security Council colleagues to Mexico, Guatemala, and El Salvador, where we spoke with a wide variety of stakeholders, and I met with Honduran Foreign Minister Rosales in Washington, DC. I have used these engagements to convey the commitment of the United States to addressing the root causes driving migration. We seek to strengthen collaborative efforts to manage migration throughout the region. The message I am sharing is that the United States is committed to working with governments, the private sector, international partners, and civil society to address these issues. We are determined to secure our border. We must enforce U.S. immigration laws while promoting safe, orderly, and humane migration and improving access to protection for those who need it.

The reality is irregular migration will continue as long as the instability, inequity, corruption, and poverty driving people from their homes outweigh their desire to stay. Our job is to alter the recurring cycle of irregular migration that strains the resources of countries across the region and drains Central America of its human capital. At the same time, we must promote access to protection and respect for human rights. This is a huge undertaking but a necessary one if we are to avoid even worse outcomes in future years.

Keeping this Committee and Congress apprised of our efforts and working with you and your teams on how best to tackle these considerable challenges is a key part of my job. I met with House Foreign Affairs Committee staff soon after starting in this position, my team has

consulted multiple times with congressional staff, and I look forward to engaging with you regularly. I welcome this opportunity to share with you what we have done so far and our plans to keep our borders secure while gradually improving access to our asylum system and working with partners to more effectively and humanely manage migration movements in the region.

Although my title is Special Envoy for the Northern Triangle, our approach to these issues must incorporate all of our partners in Central America and Mexico. We acknowledge that El Salvador, Guatemala, and Honduras are distinct countries that each face their own unique challenges. Our policy must respond to the individual complexities of each.

The Challenge and Approach

As you all know, the President cares deeply about achieving a sustainable solution to the migration challenge in the region. Vice President Harris' direct leadership on this issue is a testament to the importance this Administration places on improving conditions in Central America. The Vice President will lead U.S. engagement with the region's government leaders, private sector actors, and civil society to address the root causes of migration, promote shared prosperity in the region, and address other contributing factors such as climate change and food insecurity. Both the President and Vice President have already spoken with Mexican President Andres Manuel Lopez Obrador and Guatemalan President Alejandro Giammattei, and Secretary Blinken spoke with the Guatemalan, Honduran, and Salvadoran foreign ministers in February.

We are under no illusion the task of reducing irregular migration to the U.S. southern border will be easy. When a parent decides to send their child on a dangerous journey to a foreign country in the hopes the outcome will be better than the future available at home, we have to examine that calculus. The root causes of irregular migration -- general insecurity, lack of economic opportunity, weak rule of law, and absence of basic necessities like food and healthcare -- are endemic challenges, particularly in El Salvador, Guatemala, and Honduras, and contribute to a lack of hope that pervades the region. Unfortunately, in some respects, conditions in Central America have gotten worse, not better, over the last decade because of widespread corruption, natural disasters, increasingly unpredictable weather, and weak governance. The COVID-19 pandemic and the devastating storms that pummeled the region in November have exacerbated many of these challenges. Unfortunately, climate change only makes it more likely the region will continue to experience such extreme weather events. Factors like corruption and economic effects of COVID-19 also exacerbate the threat of persecution, exploitation, and violence at the hands of transnational criminal gangs, causing more people to seek new lives in the United States.

Short-term actions

To address this complex challenge, we have organized our activities into three categories: **managing migration, ensuring access to protection, and addressing the root causes of migration.** Achieving the structural changes necessary to address the root causes of migration will take years, but there are actions we are already taking or plan to take in the **short-term** to address the flow of migrants, offer protection to those who need it, and prepare would-be migrants for better futures while we seek commitments to ensure an enabling environment for economic investment and growth in the longer term.

As a first step to **managing migration flows**, we are working with regional governments and international organization partners to ensure the message to potential migrants is clear: (1) the U.S. border is closed; (2) we are expanding access to protection and looking to expand legal pathways for immigration; and (3) we are committed to working with the region -- not just governments but all of society -- to generate hope and create conditions that will allow Central Americans to thrive in their home countries. To ensure we can better manage migration in the region, we will help build the capacity of regional government agencies to enforce their borders, to set up checkpoints, and, as appropriate, to prevent irregular entry to their countries and to stop illicit actors including smugglers and traffickers. A key piece of this effort is our diplomatic engagement: last month, our embassies in Guatemala and Honduras worked with authorities to successfully disperse a coordinated departure of approximately 300 people in Honduras. Sustained diplomatic outreach will help reinforce continued regional collaboration. We also will expand access to legal pathways for immigration to the United States. On March 10, the State Department announced the resumption of the Central American Minors (CAM) program. CAM allows lawfully present, U.S.-based parents from El Salvador, Honduras, and Guatemala to apply for access to the U.S. Refugee Admission Program (USRAP) for their biological, step, or legally adopted unmarried children under the age of 21.

We also want to make sure those who need **protection** can access alternatives within the region and understand that reaching the U.S. southern border is not their only option. We are already working with regional governments to improve their asylum systems and responses to internally displaced persons (IDPs). We will engage in robust diplomacy with regional and international community partners to encourage them to resettle an increased number of refugees from the region.

To **help position individuals for employment in their home countries**, we will draw upon innovative USAID programs in the areas of scholarships, skills certification, education, and job training, and publicize available programs and how to access them.

Addressing root causes

To reduce migration flows and change the calculus for Central American migrants in the **long-term**, we aim to achieve structural changes, political commitments, and policy reforms that will address the root causes driving irregular migration in the region. We will also invest in the change we want to see in these countries -- as evidenced by the President's commitment to a four-year, \$4 billion strategy. U.S. foreign assistance will be crucial to these efforts, but it will not be sufficient alone, and it is not a replacement for political will. We will seek cooperation from the governments, private sector, civil society, and likeminded donors and international organizations. Where appropriate, we will collaborate with Mexico and align efforts with Mexico's Comprehensive Development Plan.

Promotion of good governance, anticorruption, and human rights must be at the center of our efforts. Together they make up the foundation for security, economic opportunity, and accountable government administration. We have seen democratic backsliding in El Salvador, Honduras, and Guatemala. Promoting accountability for government actors, encouraging increased transparency and the creation of an enabling environment for investment, and urging adherence to the Inter-American Democratic Charter and the Inter-American Convention against

Corruption will be central to our efforts. The departure of anticorruption mechanisms from Guatemala and Honduras was a setback to anticorruption efforts in the region. We continue to support attorneys general, anticorruption prosecutors, and executive branch or international-led anticorruption commissions like the International Commission against Corruption and Impunity in El Salvador, CICIES, led by the Organization of American States, to investigate and prosecute significant corruption. We will call on regional governments to adequately resource and avoid interference in the work of anticorruption units, as well as limit political pressure, including attempts to intimidate justice authorities through threats of removal of immunity. We will seek regional governments' commitment to develop clear standards for professional expertise, integrity, and political impartiality of candidates for judicial positions. We will also continue to use the tools Congress has provided, including the Global Magnitsky Act and visa restrictions under section 7031(c) of the Department's annual appropriations act, to deter corrupt behavior.

We will urge regional partners to implement reforms that will expand economic opportunity, attract investment, and generate inclusive growth to ensure all sectors of society can live and work in dignity. Broadening access to financial capital and making it easier to start a business and pay taxes will foster the growth of new businesses, particularly small- and medium-sized enterprises, which employ the majority of workers. These changes, together with regional integration, will help Central American countries achieve diversified economies that produce more, higher-value goods for export. Governments must invest in affordable, reliable electricity, and a robust transportation and information technology infrastructure, while providing for the health and education of their workforce. El Salvador, Guatemala, and Honduras need to make reforms and investments to achieve the growth rates seen by Panama and Costa Rica, and all Central American countries must work to reduce poverty in rural areas.

High levels of violence remain a challenge in the region, and we are committed to working with regional governments to combat transnational organized crime, curb illicit trafficking, and increase confidence in the public security institutions tasked with protecting communities. Through our foreign assistance, we have seen important advances in the professionalism and capability of law enforcement and security services throughout Central America and Mexico. We have seen increases in the capacity of vetted units, community policing, and violence prevention initiatives. Still, challenges remain: uneven capabilities among law enforcement and security services, inadequate resourcing of security needs, the impact of the pandemic on law enforcement, and the military's role in policing. Across the region, gender-based violence -- including but not limited to intimate partner violence, rape, and gender-based killing of women and girls (or femicide) -- and other crimes, including sex and labor trafficking and forced prostitution, hinder the ability of women and girls to participate fully in society and the economy and to contribute to their families and communities. We will seek commitments from our regional partners to implement reforms that support violence prevention and reintegration of former gang members. Again, we will need regional partners to make meaningful efforts to tackle corruption and support transparency in order to achieve sustainable progress across the criminal justice systems of Central America and Mexico.

Including all stakeholders

In addition to partners in civil society and the private sector, you in Congress are key stakeholders in addressing the root causes of migration and holding the region's governments

accountable to their commitments and have been involved in the formulation of our strategy. We will continue to engage a diverse set of actors as we execute our plans. We will also integrate vulnerable and marginalized populations, including women and youth, into our overall approach and activities, as we will only succeed if we expand opportunity and generate hope for all Central Americans.

To be successful in this endeavor, we seek your long-term bipartisan support and flexibility to help address both the push and pull factors. These will be essential elements to our success as we craft sustainable approaches to these challenges. We commit to regularly engaging with you. I'll conclude by reiterating we understand the significance and difficulty of this challenge, and I truly appreciate your interest in achieving a sustainable solution. I look forward to working with you and am happy to answer any questions.

Mr. SIREs. Thank you.
Mr. Natiello.

STATEMENT OF PETER NATIELLO, ACTING ASSISTANT ADMINISTRATOR, BUREAU FOR LATIN AMERICA AND THE CARIBBEAN, U.S. AGENCY FOR INTERNATIONAL DEVELOPMENT

Mr. NATIELLO. Chairman Sires, Ranking Member Green, and members of the subcommittee, thank you for the opportunity to testify today. Addressing the root causes of irregular migration from El Salvador, Guatemala, and Honduras is a top priority for USAID, and we are grateful for this committee's ongoing bipartisan support for our work.

At the direction of President Biden, USAID is aggressively ramping up programs to address the economic, security, and governance challenges that drive irregular migration from Central America.

There is no doubt that the conditions on the ground are difficult. COVID-19, plus the damage wrought by Hurricanes Eta and Iota, have only further complicated the situation. To help mitigate the impact of recurrent drought, severe food insecurity, and COVID-19, USAID recently deployed a Disaster Assistance Response Team to Guatemala, Honduras, and El Salvador. Thank you for mentioning that, Mr. Chairman.

Providing urgent, lifesaving humanitarian aid is a key part of USAID's mission, and we are also particularly focused on addressing the root causes of irregular migration.

USAID uses data to identify migration hotspots, so that we can scale up and focus our programs on would-be migrants from vulnerable places and help returned migrants reintegrate into their communities.

Our programming strengthens economic opportunities, security, and governance, and builds resilience to climate change in El Salvador, Guatemala, and Honduras. We know that opening doors to employment and education for citizens in their home countries would lead to safer, more prosperous societies, which is why USAID is broadening economic opportunities, especially for young people who are most at risk of migrating.

As just one example, in Guatemala, USAID recently inaugurated a new agricultural center in Huehuetenango, an area of high out-migration. This center will help more than 20,000 small farmers improve their productivity, connect them to markets, and increase their incomes. While fostering improved economic opportunities is key, these efforts will not be successful if security challenges are not addressed.

El Salvador, Guatemala, and Honduras, as has been noted, are among the most violent countries in the world, and their citizens are the target of crime and violence from criminal groups and gangs. USAID is reaching those most at risk of being victimized or committing crime and violence.

Per President Biden's February 2 Executive Order, we are particularly focused on addressing rampant gender-based violence in the region. To address this in El Salvador, USAID provided assistance to establish 52 victims' assistance centers operating at justice

institutions, with staff trained to provide legal and psychosocial services to victims, including victims of gender-based violence.

USAID also supported a specialized training program for judges related to gender-based violence crimes.

Transparent, accountable governance is also essential. Citizens of El Salvador, Guatemala, and Honduras deserve nothing less. That is why USAID works with civil society organizations to increase transparency, build respect for human rights, and promote accountability.

In Guatemala, we have recently done this through support to the Attorney General's Office to expand services to new municipalities. In fact, last week the Attorney General's Office, with our Ambassador, inaugurated 68 municipal prosecutors' offices, expanding services from 16 percent of the Nation to 100 percent coverage. These types of interventions are helping extend access to justice and to stop impunity.

In Central America, climate change is also a serious issue, contributing to more severe droughts and hurricanes and reduced water availability. Without predictable harvests that can provide stable sources of income, many rural Central Americans are driven away from their homes so that they can feed their families.

We are building resilience in Guatemala and in Honduras by promoting innovative practices and technologies that help farmers maintain and increase sustained yields throughout the year. For example, in Honduras in the Dry Corridor, which was mentioned earlier, USAID investments have provided agriculture and nutrition assistance to 251,000 people in recent years, and these beneficiaries have reported that their intention to migrate was 78 percent lower than the country overall.

As the former USAID Director in El Salvador, I have seen firsthand the powerful human impact of our programming. At the same time, USAID approaches this challenge with humility. We know that more needs to be done to ensure people have opportunities to build a better future in their home countries.

As USAID scales up efforts to address the root causes of migration, we also recognize that assistance alone will not be enough. Our success in the region depends on a long-term commitment by governments, the private sector, and civil society to combat corruption and improve governance.

To close, we are committed to supporting countries in their efforts at becoming stronger, safer, and more prosperous, so citizens can remain at home and create a better future for themselves and their families.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify, and I look forward to your questions.

[The prepared statement of Mr. Natiello follows:]

**TESTIMONY OF PETER NATIELLO
DEPUTY ASSISTANT ADMINISTRATOR
U.S. AGENCY FOR INTERNATIONAL DEVELOPMENT
BUREAU FOR LATIN AMERICA AND THE CARIBBEAN
HOUSE FOREIGN AFFAIRS SUBCOMMITTEE ON THE WESTERN HEMISPHERE,
CIVILIAN SECURITY, MIGRATION AND INTERNATIONAL ECONOMIC POLICY
APRIL 14, 2021
“RENEWING THE UNITED STATES’ COMMITMENT TO ADDRESSING
THE ROOT CAUSES OF MIGRATION FROM CENTRAL AMERICA”**

Introduction

Chairman Sires, Ranking Member Green, and Distinguished Members of the Subcommittee: thank you for the opportunity to testify on behalf of the U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID) on the root causes of irregular migration from El Salvador, Guatemala, and Honduras. This is a top priority for USAID, and we are grateful for this Committee’s ongoing, bipartisan support for our work in the region.

At the direction of President Biden and in support of his February 2nd Executive Order on migration, USAID is aggressively ramping up programs to address the economic, security, and governance challenges that drive irregular migration from Central America to the United States so that individuals are not forced to make the dangerous journey north.

There is no doubt that the conditions on the ground are difficult, and COVID-19 coupled with the damage wrought by Hurricanes Eta and Iota have only served to further complicate the situation. According to the Famine Early Warning Systems Network, food insecurity in El Salvador, Guatemala, and Honduras continues to increase because of economic shocks and recent natural disasters. Since 2017, the number of people in El Salvador, Guatemala, and Honduras who suffer from acute food insecurity has increased from approximately 1 million to more than 5 million. While many are going hungry across all three countries, there are more than four million people suffering from acute food insecurity in Guatemala and Honduras alone.

To help mitigate the impact of recurrent drought, severe food insecurity, and the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic in the region, on April 6th, USAID deployed a Disaster Assistance Response Team (DART) to respond to urgent humanitarian needs in Guatemala, Honduras, and El Salvador. The DART comprises disaster experts from USAID’s Bureau for Humanitarian Assistance, who are focused on rapidly scaling up emergency food assistance, programs to help people earn an income, protection for the most vulnerable, and other critical humanitarian programs. This team will be assessing humanitarian needs, coordinating with partners and local officials, and providing urgently needed aid to crisis-affected families and communities.

Targeting Efforts to Address Root Causes

Irregular migration is the result of a number of interrelated factors -- including a lack of economic opportunity, insecurity, corruption, governance challenges, and the impact of climate change.

USAID is targeting our efforts to address these root causes of irregular migration. Specifically, we use data to identify migration hotspots, so that we can scale up and focus programs most directly on would-be migrants from vulnerable places and help returned migrants reintegrate into their communities.

USAID has compiled migration information from multiple sources, most importantly U.S. Customs and Border Protection (CBP), the International Organization for Migration (IOM), and Vanderbilt University's Latin American Public Opinion Project, as well as host countries. By triangulating data, we have improved our ability to plan strategically and adjust programs as needed. The data we collect has enabled USAID to target the following key populations shown to have migrated in greater numbers in recent years: in Guatemala, youth, indigenous communities, and women primarily from the predominantly indigenous Western Highlands region; in Honduras, youth ages 10-29 from violent, urban areas and rural areas facing high rates of poverty and food insecurity; and in El Salvador, individuals under 40 years old earning less than \$400 per month, who are at risk of dropping out of school, or who are likely to be subjected to violence.

Strengthening Economic Opportunity, Security, Governance, and Building Resilience in El Salvador, Guatemala, and Honduras

Economic Opportunity

Most of those who attempt to migrate irregularly to the United States from El Salvador, Guatemala, and Honduras do so in search of new or better jobs and increased incomes to provide for themselves and their families. To support stronger, safer, and more prosperous societies in El Salvador, Guatemala, and Honduras, USAID is broadening economic opportunities, especially for young people, who are most at risk of migrating.

USAID's economic growth programs are expanding business, employment, and educational opportunities to the poor and those most likely to migrate, both in urban and rural areas. We know that opening doors to employment and education for citizens in their home countries will lead to safer, more prosperous societies.

For example, in February in Guatemala, USAID, as part of the U.S. government's Feed the Future Initiative, inaugurated a new agricultural training and innovation center in Huehuetenango, an area of high out-migration. This new center will assist more than 20,000 small farmers improve their productivity and product quality and increase incomes through adoption of state-of-the-art agricultural practices and technologies. In El Salvador, USAID provides grants and assistance to small and medium-sized businesses, spurring job creation for likely migrants, including vulnerable and displaced youth. And in Honduras, USAID is

providing skills training to youth at risk of migrating and returnees to increase their earning potential, making them more economically resilient, and less likely to migrate or re-migrate.

Partnering with the private sector is also essential to bolstering economic security in the region. USAID works with local and multinational companies in El Salvador, Guatemala, and Honduras to capitalize on their know-how, resources, and expertise to accelerate job creation. Our partnerships with companies such as Starbucks, Walmart, Microsoft, and Tigo, have helped mobilize private investment, expand opportunities, and create jobs. Recently, USAID leveraged more than \$85 million from the private sector and other organizations in El Salvador, Guatemala, and Honduras to support vocational training, education, and employment opportunities for at-risk youth, and increased food security and incomes for vulnerable communities.

Security

While fostering improved economic opportunities in the region is key, these efforts will not be successful if security challenges in the region are not addressed. The countries of El Salvador, Guatemala, and Honduras are among the most violent in the world, and their citizens are frequently the target of crime, and violence, and exploitation from criminal groups and gangs. USAID is addressing security challenges at the national, community, and family levels to reach those most at risk of being victimized or committing crime and violence.

Per President Biden's February 2nd Executive Order, we are particularly focused on addressing rampant gender-based violence (GBV) in the region. In a USAID 2020 Gender Analysis conducted in Honduras, women were nearly twice as likely to cite violence as a reason for migrating, indicating that GBV is a particular driver for migration among women. We are creating and expanding primary and secondary school-based GBV prevention programming; enhancing the capacity of police, judicial systems, and child protection systems to identify, investigate, and prosecute cases of GBV; and creating and expanding locally available medical, mental health, legal services, and shelters for GBV survivors in rural and urban areas.

In Guatemala we recently inaugurated two new government centers that co-locate several government institutions to provide around the clock services to female and child victims of violence and exploitation.

In Honduras, USAID addresses GBV through education programs in schools and youth outreach centers, strengthening the institutional capacity of civil society organizations working to reduce GBV, improving the efficiency of services and referrals to public health clinics, providing family counseling, promoting economic opportunities for vulnerable groups, improving access to quality and equitable justice services, and providing anti-GBV training geared towards men.

And in El Salvador, USAID provided assistance for the establishment of 52 victim assistance centers operating at justice institutions with staff trained to provide legal and psychosocial services to victims, including victims of GBV. USAID also supported a specialized training program for judges related to GBV crimes.

Through our Central America Regional Security Initiative, USAID supports community-based approaches to crime and violence prevention, as well as rule of law programs. This includes helping youth escape the influence of gangs by establishing outreach centers and reclaiming public spaces for local communities.

We also are providing families and young people the chance to improve their lives through counseling on conflict management and by building trust between residents and the justice system. In Guatemala, we are working with the government to increase the investigation and prosecution of smugglers. USAID supported the Government of Guatemala in establishing a Specialized Prosecutor's Office Against the Illicit Smuggling of Migrants within the Public Ministry. We are now increasing our support to the unit enabling it to adopt the latest investigation, prosecution, and case management models to effectively dismantle the smuggling networks that prey upon potential migrants.

USAID's community-based crime and violence prevention programs are done in conjunction with complementary law enforcement programs supported by the Department of State.

These interventions have been very successful. In Honduras, from 2015-2020, neighborhoods with integrated CARSI programs experienced a 70 percent reduction in homicides that included some of Honduras's most violent communities -- a 20 percent greater reduction than the national average.

Governance

Transparent, accountable governance is essential, and the citizens of El Salvador, Guatemala, and Honduras deserve nothing less.

That's why USAID works with civil society organizations in the region to increase transparency, build respect for human rights, and promote accountability. Specifically, we empower civil society organizations to advocate for reforms and exercise greater oversight over governments. We also work with central and municipal governments and support community groups to improve transparency and accountability and to expand services to citizens, with a particular focus on traditionally marginalized, migration-prone populations.

In Guatemala, for example, until recently, justice services did not reach a significant number of municipalities. USAID supported the Public Ministry in its commitment to expand services to new municipalities. With USAID support, on April 9, 2021 the Public Ministry inaugurated 68 municipal prosecutor's offices, expanding services from 16 percent nationwide coverage in 2018 to 100 percent coverage in 2021. This is an important milestone in addressing Guatemala's high incidence of impunity and extending access to justice for all Guatemalans.

In Honduras, USAID supports the National Anti-corruption Council (CNA), which has trained more than 600 public officials and nearly 300 civil society actors on transparency and the fight against corruption, including public procurement best practices. CNA has also presented twelve reports to date in its Corruption in the Times of COVID-19 series. These reports have identified alleged acts of corruption involving approximately \$68 million in purchases of medical equipment, including personal protective equipment and ventilators, low-quality materials to improve hospitals' infrastructure, and the highly controversial purchase of seven mobile

hospitals. Most recently, USAID reached nearly 84,000 Hondurans through a three-day anti-corruption social media campaign developed by the National Anti-Corruption Council.

Climate Change and Building Resilience

In Central America, climate change has contributed to more severe droughts, stronger and more frequent hurricanes, and reduced water availability. Without predictable harvests that can provide stable sources of income, many rural Central Americans are driven away from their home communities so that they can feed their families. USAID is committed to helping the governments and people of the region adapt to the effects of climate change and build resilience to future environmental shocks.

For example, in Guatemala and Honduras, USAID is promoting innovative practices and technologies that help farmers maintain and increase sustained yields throughout the year. This includes providing technical assistance to farmers to introduce drought resistant varieties and take measures to promote water conservation and better irrigation practices. These interventions are helping improve livelihoods, increase food security and help deter migration. In Honduras, USAID agriculture investments have provided agriculture and nutrition assistance to 251,000 people, and these beneficiaries have reported that their intention to migrate was 78 percent lower than the country overall. In Guatemala, USAID's climate change investments are also helping spur economic growth while combating deforestation, Guatemala's largest driver of greenhouse gas emissions. Since 2013, USAID-supported community concessions have created more than 20,000 permanent and seasonal jobs and boast a net-zero deforestation rate - demonstrating that people who make their living from the forest have a strong incentive to protect it.

Moving Forward: Challenges and Opportunities

As I have worked in several USAID Missions across the region, including serving as the former Mission Director in El Salvador, I have seen firsthand the profound human impact of our programming.

While we are proud of our accomplishments, we also recognize that more needs to be done to ensure individuals have opportunities to build a better future in their home countries.

As USAID aggressively scales up efforts to address the root causes of migration, we also recognize that assistance alone will not be enough. USAID's success in the region depends on a long-term commitment by governments, the private sector and civil society organizations to combat corruption and improve governance. We seek to work with leaders committed to the rule of law. In particular, civil society leaders play a fundamental role in ensuring that citizens are holding governments accountable.

As we advance these efforts, USAID looks forward to working with Congress on a bipartisan basis. We know that our programs must remain agile. We will continue to monitor and evaluate our work and adjust accordingly -- to scale up what is working, and to learn from, modify or terminate approaches that are not working.

Conclusion

Addressing the root causes of migration can be a win-win for the United States and the people of El Salvador, Guatemala and Honduras. As Vice President Harris said, “The work is not easy, but it is important. It is work that we demand — and the people of our countries need — to help stem the tide that we have seen.”

USAID is redoubling our efforts in the region to meet this critical moment and help make communities in El Salvador, Guatemala, and Honduras strong, safe, and more prosperous so that citizens can remain and work for a better future for themselves and their families.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify. I look forward to your questions.

Mr. SIRE. Thank you very much.

We will now start with members' questions. I will start myself.

You know, I have been on this committee now for 15 years, and for years I have advocated that this country should focus more intensely on the Western Hemisphere. Whether I have not—you know, I have noticed that we just do not focus enough on this region, whether it is Republican, Democratic, and I am very happy to hear that President Biden now is really focusing in this region.

But, you know, like anything else, it has to be sustained. We are not going to change the things that are wrong with these countries, or help change the things that are wrong in these countries, overnight.

And one of the concerns that I always have is the corruption piece that when we are just getting ahead in some of these areas, you know, all of a sudden there is a change, and all of the good things that we did for a few years is thrown out.

So I was just wondering if you can talk a little bit about sustaining the effort of this country in the region to make sure that we just do not do it when there is a crisis at the border, that we need to focus on fixing some of the issues there.

Mr. ZUNIGA. Mr. Chairman, thank you very much. I believe you have identified exactly the most important issue here, which is sustainability. The United States has a long-term commitment in Central America, particularly dating from the 1980's forward. We have assisted, through multiple initiatives, beginning with the Caribbean Basin Initiative, and our security support during the 1980's, and extended over decades various levels of support.

But as you say, the conditions in Central America have worsened over time, and at this point the question is, how do we arrest that slide?

Our cooperation in Central America is really focused on three areas: security cooperation to improve that very high level of crime that citizens experience; prosperity promotion, so that people can have a way of life that is dignified and gives them reason to remain rooted; and third, governance.

And I would say that as President Biden approaches this issue, he has put governance at the very center and anti-corruption at the center precisely because you cannot have those other two, prosperity or security, if you do not have a government in which citizens can have confidence, a government that delivers public good and which deals with cases of corruption from the inside and works to improve its performance.

Our approach is really learned from the experience of CICIG and MACCIH—CICIG in Guatemala and MACCIH in Honduras—in a proven model. And that proven model is that there are people in Central America within the public sector and civil society, and in the private sector, who have the political will and who have the capacity to improve governance. But they face entrenched corruption in many cases, and systems that have worked to prevent government from working at the service of the people.

Our job is—as an outside actor is to recognize that change has to come from Central America. In order to be sustained, it must come—it must be organic, and it must come from the systems that exist, but with political cover and other technical support for those

who are willing to do the hard work of uncovering and dealing with corruption. That is the only way that we can have sustainability in these other areas.

I mentioned CICIG and MACCIH. Again, the model works when you have outside support, and not just from the United States. It can be from the OAS. In the case of CICIG, it was with the United Nations. But in the case of El Salvador, we had a very active attorney general, Melendez, who all he required was the support of the U.S. Embassy, plus the support of a few other external actors.

And what we see is that if you have that level of international support and clear backing for those actors, they have enormous public backing. The political will exists. It exists in the population, and our job is to try to find ways to energize that and have that turn into policy locally.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Mr. SIRE. Thank you. My time is up.

Congressman Green.

Mr. GREEN. Thank you, Chairman.

And, again, thank you both for your testimony today. Congratulations on your new positions. I want to—really appreciate that, and for your service to the country. Thanks for the call yesterday. I really appreciated that and enjoyed starting our relationship.

I think there is a real opportunity for some bipartisanship here. I mean, I really do. Despite all of the other stuff where we disagree, I think most—or let me—let me make sure my words are as accurate as I can make them. There are many Democrats and many Republicans who recognize that dependence on China is bad for America, certainly in certain supply chains.

I think there are Democrats and Republicans who see that manufacturing jobs have been significantly lost, and opportunity in Latin America is down. And I think there are Democrats and Republicans who see that that decreased opportunity is a part of the push factor out of Latin America, decreased opportunity and with the corruption and crime, all of the other things that we have talked about. So there is an opportunity.

And I mentioned this—going after whether it is, you know, the Development Finance Corporation, you know, private dollars or some other source to incentivize—create incentives to have, you know, companies that are manufacturing in China move from there to Latin America. It would be great if they could come into the United States, but in many cases their business models just do not support that.

So my question to both of you, and I really want to make sure I leave time for both of you to comment on this, what do you think are the real incentives? And what do we have to do to get those manufacturing jobs from China to Latin America?

Mr. ZUNIGA. Mr. Ranking Member, thank you very much. That is a crucial point. The real factor in driving improvements in Central America is the creation of opportunities in Central America. Over the last month, since assuming this role, I have been approached by many U.S. companies and local companies with many ideas about ways to incentivize precisely that transfer of manufacturing from China to Central America. In many cases, it involves building out existing capacity.

There is extensive capacity in the textiles sector, for example, and I think you identified correctly that we have an opportunity. And the fact that China is involved in Central America is because they also see an opportunity. We are talking about the challenges here today, but it is also important to note that CAFTA-DR countries represent our third largest market in the Americas. They support 134,000 U.S. jobs, and that is in dire conditions.

If we are able to energize manufacturing, working with the actors that you named, the Development Finance Corporation, the IDB, the World Bank, and other actors, then—and identify those roadblocks, and they are beginning to come in with those roadblocks, and I would really welcome a chance to talk with you about that.

Mr. GREEN. Yes. I look forward to that, too.

And from USAID's perspective, I would really love to hear from you as well, sir.

Mr. NATIELLO. Thank you for that question, Ranking Member, and we absolutely are keenly interested and promote the creation of jobs and the placement of young people in those jobs in Central America. Our efforts would benefit greatly from greater private investment in the region certainly.

When I was Mission Director in El Salvador and would talk to private sector actors there, both from El Salvador and from other countries, I would ask them, what are the things that prevent greater private investment here? And they would often name two things. They would name inefficient customs, and they would name high energy costs. And that is why USAID has provided technical assistance to those countries, to help improve the efficiency of their customs systems and also to help with the issue of a regional integrated energy market for Central America.

I do think some of the comments that have been made here this morning about perhaps local monopolies, et cetera, not having an interest in those kinds of regional integrated markets are a block that our diplomatic colleagues have worked on. They are important to address because it is tough to break those bottlenecks with foreign assistance alone.

It is really important as we work together with the State Department and with our embassies in the region to address those kinds of governance blockages to the kinds of issues that—

Mr. GREEN. Any help that we can give in addressing those blockages, as you—to use your term, I am all in.

Real quick, for the written testimony coming back, because I only have 12 seconds, I would love also to hear about your thoughts on China and the commodity boom and its impact on the environment and how much that is a push factor. And I will have to get that in written testimony.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Mr. SIRES. Thank you, Congressman Green.

We now recognize Chairman Gregory Meeks.

Mr. MEEKS. Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Let me, again, thank you and Ranking Member Green. And I could not agree with you more, Mr. Chairman, that part of the problem has been we are not focused enough on the Western Hemisphere. I have been in Congress

now for 22 years and on the Western Hemisphere subcommittee for 22 years before I became chairman of this committee.

And I am saying that this committee will be focused and utilizing our oversight responsibility on what we are doing in trying to make—in the Western Hemisphere and making sure that we have some consistency as to what is taking place. That is tremendously important. There is a lot that is going on.

And when we are talking about the underlying conditions that is taking place in the Northern Triangle, it is time for us to take a real focus on it and come and to make sure that we are getting the best bang for our buck.

For example, let me ask this question. One of the issues that I often, you know, that concerns me, in 2019 the Honduras had the highest femicide rate of any Latin American country. And it was followed by El Salvador and Guatemala was rated seventh in femicides in the region.

So, you know, then we had COVID-19 and many women and girls were isolated in unsafe environments. And although data on gender-based violence and femicide during the pandemic is hard to collect, we know that it continues.

So my question is, to our witnesses, how does gender-based violence affect women and girls' likelihood of migrating and to try to get their children out? And how will the United States address gender-based violence in its strategy to tackle drivers of migration from the Northern Triangle?

Mr. ZUNIGA. Mr. Chairman, thank you for that question. It really is central to the social difficulties and challenges faced across Central America. Gender-based violence is a major push factor, but it is not just that. It is also a major factor in the social dislocation that feeds, for example, the growth of gangs in El Salvador, and in many cases we have focused rightly on transnational organized crime and on crime associated with drug trafficking.

But the fact is, crime is experienced different ways in El Salvador and Honduras and Guatemala. Extortion is one way, but violence in the home and violence against women is one of the leading causes of social instability.

So the strategy that we are driving is going to put gender-based violence at the center of our work because of its importance across all aspects of society in Central America, including for that matter in the economy. Women make up a very large proportion of the informal economy. Violence and insecurity experienced by women is a drag on every aspect of social life.

Part of this is going to involve raising up the issue of gender-based violence as a core problem. But a lot of it is going to involve work that has been ongoing, working with civil society, working with law enforcement, and working with judiciaries to ensure that women have access to security and access to the judicial system. Unfortunately, impunity around domestic violence has also been a key factor in why it has continued.

I am going to see if the other witness has anything that he would like to add. Mr. Natiello?

Mr. MEEKS. Do you have anything to add?

Mr. NATIELLO. Yes, Mr. Chairman. Thank you for that question. And I am just going to add to the Special Envoy's response that

USAID uses foreign assistance resources to support responses to gender-based violence.

Just two quick examples. In Guatemala, we recently inaugurated with the government two new centers that co-locate 10 or more government services and government institutions to provide 24-hour services to women and child victims of violence. We are now working with the Guatemalan justice sector to expand this model to other regions of the country.

And I will just say that in El Salvador we forwarded the establishment of 52 victims assistance centers with the Attorney General's Office. These operate with trained staff to provide legal and psychosocial services to victims, including victims of gender-based violence.

I visited one of those centers when I was the Mission Director there in 2019, and it was good to see those women getting the services that they need because we all recognize that gender-based violence is an important driver of irregular migration.

Mr. MEEKS. Thank you. Let me just ask another quick question with the little time I have. What impact does climate change have on migration? And do you believe that the United States should receive climate refugees? Yes or no.

Mr. ZUNIGA. Climate has an immense impact on migration from Central America. Mr. Chairman, I believe you are familiar with the Dry Corridor, the expansion of the Dry Corridor, and the—so there has to be an intense focus and has been already. We have dedicated significant resources to helping improve water systems and irrigation systems. That is also going to be an area of focus.

The reality is that we have to help, in many different ways, the agricultural industry adapt to the new realities that we are seeing. Central America is one of the most impacted areas in the world as a result of climate change, affecting everything from the coffee harvest, the main export crop of Honduras, for example, to the ability of subsistence farmers to endure 1 year after another.

And, finally, I would note that the historic hurricanes, two in a row, one right after the other in November of last year, are further evidence of the vulnerability of the region and why we are spending time there.

On the issue of climate refugees, that is beyond my scope as Special Envoy, but I am happy to take that question back to the Department of State.

Mr. MEEKS. Thank you. I am out of time. I yield back.

Mr. SIRE. We are now going to recognize Congressman Pfluger.

Mr. PFLUGER. Thank you, Mr. Chairman, and Ranking Member Green; to the witnesses, congratulations, as my colleagues have mentioned, for your service, and thank you for stepping forward.

Mr. Zuniga, for you, have you been to our southern border in the last couple of months to visit any of the facilities, whether they are processing sites, emergency intake facilities?

Mr. ZUNIGA. Representative Pfluger, thank you very much for that question. I have not been to the southern border to examine the facilities. My very first posting was actually in Matamoros, Mexico. I am familiar with the Rio Grande Valley. But in this role, I have been focused on cooperating with governments in the region and assisting my colleagues who are very focused on the border

itself, which is a very large contingent of both DHS, Health and Human Services, and other colleagues.

Mr. PFLUGER. So we have an HHS facility in my district that was just opened about 4 weeks ago. And one of the things that HHS officials are saying in Midland, Texas, and I suspect this is also the same in others, is that the asylum cooperative agreements that were in place and, you know, other policies, MPP, that have been rescinded, have directly led to an opening—a thought, a perception of opening the border.

And right now you can look at the numbers. I think they speak for themselves. Whether it is 34,000 in March 2020, 172,000 in March 2021, you know, there is an enormous amount of pressure on our southern border. So when will we get—I know there is discussions on these cooperative agreements. When will they actually be put back in place from the State Department's or the Administration's perspective?

Mr. ZUNIGA. So President Biden, upon taking office, as part of his Executive Order suspended the implementation of the ACAs. Certainly, we recognize that there is immense pressure on the southwest border, as there has been in past years. In 2019, there was another massive wave of migration, even though it was very clear that the messaging was that people would not be able to get across the border.

Our assessment is the push factors at this point, and especially now because of the hurricanes and the effects of the pandemic, are driving migration, along with messaging. Much of it is driven by coyotes and others who are making money.

Mr. PFLUGER. Do you think that the reason that the cartels, the coyotes, the drug trafficking organizations are incentivized—because the HHS officials in Midland have told me specifically that the—this is the largest amount and percentage of children who are being trafficked in the history of these issues.

So I am very concerned, and I appreciate your testimony saying that Vice President Harris is going to take a strong stance to work with agreements in this countries. But to date, I have not seen any messaging. And as reflected in the lack of agreements, the reversal of these agreements, that is causing this surge right now.

So I would like to understand what Vice President Harris is going to do, what you all are recommending to her on communication, coordination, and these different agreements with these countries that will stop that surge and actually lead to a more humane way of dealing with some of these folks who are in bad condition.

Mr. ZUNIGA. So I think—Representative Pfluger, I think it is very important for us to communicate that we are going to enforce our border, that the law will be enforced.

With respect to the ACAs, looking back at where they were implemented, it was really only implemented in Guatemala, and the total number of people removed under the ACA was 1,000 people. Given the numbers of people that came in 2019 during that wave, and in earlier years and in the current one, that ultimately did not represent much of a disincentive.

The other is there are many ways to communicate and create a psychology that people have a better reason to stay than to try to make that dangerous journey. And among other things, we have to

work with governments on the communication side of this, and we do that. Just for one example, in the case of Guatemala, we communicate in five different indigenous languages using local providers who know the community and using information gleaned from the people who have had that experience to highlight the areas. The story is not just do not come, but why should not you come.

Mr. PFLUGER. I appreciate that. I am going to reclaim the last 15 seconds. And, look, I think the comments have been made before, we need to address the root causes, but there are also systemic symptoms that we can communicate better on that tell cartels and those organizations that are trafficking people that it is not okay to exploit children, especially right now.

Title 42 should remain in place. It should be applied across the board, especially with the threat of COVID. Ten to 11 percent in Midland, Texas, in our facility are positive with COVID, and this is just one of the issues that is going on.

I would encourage everyone to think about how we communicate. It is imperative that Vice President Harris communicate that our border is closed. We will address the situation and the root causes in the best way we can, but right now that message is not being delivered. It needs to be delivered to everyone.

And with that, Mr. Chairman, thank you for the extra time.

Mr. SIRES. We now recognize Congressman Castro, and then we will go to our Ranking Member McCaul.

Mr. CASTRO. Thank you. Earlier this week there were reports that the Biden Administration had made an agreement with the governments of Mexico, Guatemala, and Honduras to temporarily increase security at their borders in order to stop migrants from reaching the United States border.

We have been informed by the State Department that those reports were not accurate, and there were no agreements reached with these countries. Rather than agreements, we have been told that there are continued conversations about reducing the flow of migration, including by strengthening border security. As you may understand, these early reports cause many human rights organizations to express concerns about potential escalating violence against migrants in the hands of police and troops.

So I just want to confirm, were there any agreements reached in relation to increasing border security in these countries?

Mr. ZUNIGA. Representative Castro, no, there were no agreements concluded with governments regarding border security. We do agree that it is very important to continue to work together and collaborate, to manage migration in a way that enhances the security of every country and allows governments to enforce their borders as—just as the United States does.

In the case of unaccompanied children in particular, this very vulnerable group, one area that we want to continue to work on is with—to enhance the ability of social welfare agencies in each country to identify children that are traveling with caravans and other groups, and ensure that they are not able to continue on that dangerous journey unattended by any supervision at all, and there we have had some progress, including in Honduras, including in

the most recent caravan. That seems to be an area where we have some additional cooperation.

Thank you.

Mr. CASTRO. All right. I have a question for Mr. Natiello. The role and presence of the United Nations in Mexico and Central America has increased significantly in the last several years. Today organizations like the U.N. Refugee Agency have an active and daily role in the processing of refugees reaching the U.S.-Mexico border.

Can you describe the role of the U.N. in supporting refugees in the U.S.-Mexico border—at the U.S.-Mexico border?

Mr. NATIELLO. Thanks for that question, Representative. Our colleagues at the State Department, the PRM colleagues, manage the refugee challenges, so they are best placed to respond to that. I will simply say that USAID has important partnerships with U.N. agency—

Mr. CASTRO. Yes. I was going to ask, how can USAID work with the U.N. on this mission?

Mr. NATIELLO. Thank you so much for that. And so through our humanitarian assistance programs—and, again, as I have mentioned earlier, we have recently stood up a Disaster Assistance Response Team, a DART. We stood one up in November after the hurricanes and took it down, but have stood it up again, given the serious acute food insecurity issues. We work very closely with the U.N. on humanitarian assistance with the World Food Programme, and with other U.N. organizations, as well.

We have close relationships with the International Organization for Migration, and with IOM we are supporting returnees to have a dignified and a humane return back to their countries when they are sent back. With IOM, it is part of the U.N. system. We support seven returnee centers in the three countries, in El Salvador, Honduras, and Guatemala.

We also work closely with the UNDP on a program called Infosegura, and it is a really important tool to help the three governments collect data on crime and violence. And the governments and civil societies in those countries are using that data from UNDP to inform the making of public policy and to help mayors come up with better responses for—

Mr. CASTRO. Thank you, Mr. Natiello. Let me reclaim my time, just because I want to make some closing remarks here.

First of all, Mr. Zuniga, I want to wish you the best of luck on all of your very important work. I do think that the Biden Administration has a chance to reimagine how we approach this challenge. I think that whatever our politics are, I hope that we can agree that most people do not want to trek 1,000 miles, leaving their home country, oftentimes with kids in tow, if they do not have to. I do not think that people consider that a summer camp activity.

And so, as you think about how you do development, I think we have to be mindful of a few things. I mean, there are current conditions like the natural disasters, the abject poverty, corrupt leaders, violent drug gangs, that force people to leave their homes.

There are also historical facts, including destabilizing U.S. interventions, significant interventions in Latin America over the years,

if we are going to be honest with ourselves, that have destabilized the situation there.

And we also have to make sure that in terms of our development work, often what I have seen is that the part of the way that we measure success is whether American companies get rich doing business down there. That is not the measure of success.

I mean, look, we are all for American enterprise. We want our businesses to do well. But if we are talking about lifting a group of people and nations out of poverty, the measure—the primary measure cannot be whether, you know, a Fortune 500 company or—you know, makes a lot of money in Latin America.

So we have to be mindful of what we do with our investments and how we give the people of those nations a stake, including I think an ownership stake, in these enterprises, so that they can also take ownership and be lifted out of poverty and restore the rule of law in many of these places.

With that, I yield back.

Mr. SIRE. Thank you. Ranking Member McCaul?

Mr. MCCAUL. Thank you, Mr. Chairman and Ranking Member, for holding this very important and timely hearing. I have dealt with this issue probably my entire professional career, both as a Federal prosecutor in the Western District of Texas, as chairman of the Homeland Security Committee for 6 years, and now as the ranking member of the full committee on the Foreign Affairs Committee.

You will see in these pictures the recent trip—I just returned from the Rio Grande Valley sector. I think as both of you know, it is probably the most active, busiest sector, down on the border right now. It was, in my judgment, the worst I have ever seen it. A true humanitarian crisis.

A trail of tears coming out of the Rio Grande River to the temporary detention facility, and then to the Donna Detention Facility, where these children were 100 percent over capacity in the pod space. Ten percent have COVID. That 5-year-old crying, not knowing where she was, not knowing—her parents aren't there, her family is not there, she is 5 years old.

This should touch all Americans, not just Republicans or Democrats, but it is a sad, sad story. And we need to do something about this.

When I talked to the Border Patrol sector chief, he told me this was not a seasonal phenomenon, that this was a direct cause and effect by the rescission of certain policies from the previous Administration, specifically the Remain in Mexico policy and the agreements that were hammered out between Central America, the asylum cooperation agreements.

On the first day of office, President Biden rescinded these agreements. And within 2 months, we have the worst crisis that we have ever seen down there. And the Border Patrol—you listen to them, not the politicians—they will tell you it is a direct cause and effect of the President's actions.

So, but I think we can still solve this problem, and we have to. We cannot allow this to go on. The traffickers, quite simply, are controlling our borders now, out-resourcing our Border Patrol agents, better technology, making \$15 million a day, almost half a

billion dollars a month, off these children that they exploit the 40-day trek from Central America. They exploit them and extort, as you know, the families, at 5-to \$8,000 a child. They have to mortgage their homes and their ranches. We also need to address the root cause.

I can talk all about border security all day long. But until we address the root cause it is going to continue to happen.

We passed bipartisan—the chairman and the former chairman, Eliot Engel, and I—the Northern Triangle Enhanced Engagement Act signed into law. It requires basically the Administration to submit a 5-year strategy to address the drivers of illegal immigration. I think that is very prescient looking back on it, and we look forward to the report that is due I think within the first 6 months of this Administration.

I want to close with this, and I have been talking to our Ambassadors, Mr. Zuniga, as I know you have been working very closely. I will be meeting with several of them later today about solutions.

One solution I want to throw out to you. If the President is not willing to take these asylum policies and bring them back in place, we need to look at I think a very creative approach. This committee authorized into law the Development Finance Corporation. It was designed essentially to eliminate the political risk in developing nations to counter the influence of the Chinese Communist Party.

I can think of no region in the world where this corporation, the DFC, could fit better, given China's activities in Central America. I have talked to a lot of investors about whether they think this is an opportunity, and I think the Development Finance Corporation, as you know, gets a return on its investment.

I would urge you—I look forward to working with you, the two of you, on this very creative approach that I think from a foreign policy standpoint—I would consider this to be a foreign policy blunder, but I think a foreign policy success for all Americans and this Administration would be to work with the DFC and private investors.

When I talked to the investor from Guatemala, he told me that that would help more than anything. Throwing billions of dollars down a rabbit hole in corrupt governance isn't always the answer. But this I think creates a very good opportunity that we should all be taking advantage of that can really get to the root cause of the problem.

With that, I yield to the witnesses.

Mr. ZUNIGA. Thank you, Mr. Ranking Member. And I have to say, in fact, we have been working very actively with the DFC precisely because we believe that assistance has to be targeted. It is limited in how we can use it. Often you cannot use it with governments for precisely the oversight reasons that you mentioned. And it really is about creating opportunity.

And so we have to work with people who know how to create opportunity, and that is the private sector, that is technical specialists in the DFC and others who know how to build small and medium enterprises, which is the major employer really in Central America beyond manufacturing and large-scale enterprises.

There is a lot of talent in not just the DFC but in the partners that they work with. For example, in the Central American Eco-

nomic Integration Bank where they already have \$100 million to assist small companies affected by COVID, the pandemic, and there is enormous opportunity there.

With regard to the strategy, we are in fact working on that strategy. We would like it to be collaborative. And rather than presenting a finished product, what we want to do is bring a product that—and we are going to continue to work with you and your teams to ensure that we have as much of a consensus vision as we can possibly get regarding our investment, the investment of tax dollars, but also the investment of our political profile and our time and the time of Members of Congress to address these root causes, and beginning with rule of law, which—and creating a level playing field for those who want to invest in Latin America and Central America.

Ambassador Quinonez of Guatemala is an excellent partner, and we completely agree and we work very closely with him and look forward to working with you and your team.

Mr. MCCAUL. Mr. Chairman, if I could say in closing, I am not—I am really not interested in scoring political points on the backs of these children. What I am interested in doing is solving a crisis, and it is a crisis. So I would offer my assistance to work with this Administration to resolve this issue, because it is an American issue that we need to fix for these children precisely.

And this is, Mr. Chairman, why this committee I think had the foresight to authorize the Development Finance Corporation into law in the first place. I was one of the main authors of that bill, and I know this is precisely what it was designed to do.

And so thank you so much. I yield back.

Mr. SIRES. Thank you, Ranking Member.

We now recognize Congressman Andy Levin for 5 minutes.

Mr. LEVIN. Thank you so much, Mr. Chairman, for holding this incredibly important hearing.

Hurricanes Eta and Iota devastated Guatemala and Honduras last year. People lost their homes and in some cases their crops, schools, and access to roads. These storms were part of the most active Atlantic hurricane season on record, and climate change experts say it is just a preview of what is to come for Central America.

Storm winds and rains are getting heavier, and storms are getting slower, sitting on top of communities for days at a time. Experts say that as these impacts of climate change intensify we should expect to see even more migration northward.

So let me ask both of you to comment briefly. Given that the region has struggled with repeated environmental shocks in recent years, does the Administration intend to put a greater emphasis on climate adaptation efforts as part of its plans to tackle the root causes of migration?

Mr. ZUNIGA. Thank you very much, Representative Levin. Yes. That is absolutely the intent of the Administration. As you say, the extraordinary vulnerability of populations in Central America to the effects of climate change, which are felt today and in recent years, and not at some future date, we understand that that is a major driver of insecurity and lack of opportunity in Central America.

That seems like a very clear area in which we need to put our focus. That happens to be one of the areas where the Vice President is very focused as well. And we are looking to work with partners to drive that agenda.

Mr. LEVIN. Mr. Natiello, do you want to comment briefly?

Mr. NATIELLO. Yes. Thank you very much for that question. And we see climate change certainly as a critical issue for the region. USAID has and will continue—and we expect to deepen our efforts under the current Administration—to support communities, particularly in the Dry Corridor, to better manage their water, so better watershed management.

We currently do—we work with thousands of farm families on drip irrigation. We have had great success with that. As I mentioned in my opening comments, we have reached about 250,000 people in Honduras in the Dry Corridor with those efforts which are increasing incomes. And these people say they are less inclined to migrate than the national average.

We also help farmers diversify their crops to manage their risks against climate change, and particularly by introducing agroforestry and tree crops because those are important for climate as well.

And the last thing I will say is that our Bureau of Humanitarian Assistance at USAID is very focused on these issues. They just stood up a Disaster Assistance Response Team and are providing support now, given the acute food insecurity in the region that we are seeing. And that will continue to be an important intervention for USAID. We will continue to support governments in terms of strengthening their capabilities to better manage disasters and to get out ahead of them, so that there is a lower impact on human lives.

Mr. LEVIN. All right. Let me move to my next point. And since you already spoke to this, I am just going to ask you to get back to me on it. Regardless of how well we do with mitigation, the impacts of climate change are so massive at this point that we are not going to prevent climate refugees from Central America from migrating northward altogether, in the short term certainly.

So I am going to ask you to get back to me. You said that, you know, the whole question of asylum for climate refugees is something that you are not sure about or it is not in your wheelhouse. I am going to ask you to get back to me about the Administration's policy, because this is something we simply have to deal with.

Finally, let me ask you, Mr. Zuniga, about our history in Central America, our history of intervention, which is both very long and goes to very recent times, including overthrowing democratic governments.

What can you tell us about the level of trust or, on the other hand, the level of skepticism that exists in the region about our relationship, and how does that impact your diplomatic efforts? And given the level of skepticism, what do you think could be done to rebuild trust between the United States and the countries of the Northern Triangle?

Mr. ZUNIGA. Thank you, Representative Levin. I think the important point here is twofold. One, that certainly we have a complex history in Central America. We also have very deep connections be-

tween our societies. Just in the case of El Salvador, with 3 million Salvadorans living in the United States, the reality is that they view, Central Americans view themselves as deeply connected to the United States.

And I would say that the recent episodes demonstrate that when things go wrong in Central America, they impact the United States. That is why it is so important for us to respond as a nation on that point.

The second point I would say is, how do we build trust? First, by presence, by being there, by demonstrating that we are on the side of those who are enduring difficult conditions, and in particular in the area of government. They should have hope, and that is something that the United States can do in a very clear manner.

Mr. LEVIN. My time has expired. Thank you, Mr. Chairman, very much.

Mr. SIRE. We now recognize Congresswoman Salazar.

Ms. SALAZAR. Thank you, Chairman, and Ricardo Zuniga, welcome, and may the Lord help you with your new job.

You know, I represent District Number 27, which is the home of thousands of people from Honduras, Guatemala, El Salvador, Nicaragua, Miami, the capital of the Americas. Not only I lived in Central America, was a war correspondent for Univision Network while the civil war was going on, so I not only love the area, know it very well, but now represent the people.

We have been talking about child sex trafficking, which is, I am sure you know, one of the fastest-growing international crimes in the world, and unfortunately the southern border is the port of entry. This year, the Biden Administration has apprehended 52,000 families, but only 140—52,000, under 140 were DNA tested.

So that means that we do not know if the adult that is accompanying the child is the father or the trafficker. And now it has stopped running DNA samples—the Administration.

So, in other words, if you think about it, the American authorities are facilitating the traffickers to keep their preys. Don't you think this is embarrassing? This is a problem.

Mr. ZUNIGA. Thank you, Representative Salazar. I agree that it is a priority to identify and for the U.S. authorities to be able to make sure that the welfare of the children is at the top of the agenda.

Ms. SALAZAR. But it is not happening. It is not happening, and there is no money to it. Now let's go to the money; that is what we are here for. \$4 billion in direct cash payments to Central America. I agree with you that we should have a marshal plan in place for the area. But when you see that the Hondurans—1 out of \$10 in Honduras goes to the hands of corruption or to corrupt politicians or to the drug cartels.

And in Guatemala, 65 percent of the Guatemalans do not trust the government. One out of 4 has paid a bribe. Who are we giving this money to? To the NGO's?

Mr. ZUNIGA. Primarily to—first of all, we completely agree that oversight of U.S. taxpayer dollars has to be the priority.

Ms. SALAZAR. Right.

Mr. ZUNIGA. So the way that we do that is by working with trusted partners who have reliably worked—

Ms. SALAZAR. And who are those?

Mr. ZUNIGA. So it depends on the circumstance, but usually it is implementers that the United States has a long experience with that are either in the United States or in the region. So——

Ms. SALAZAR. But who are they, NGO's, private sector?

Mr. ZUNIGA. NGO's.

Ms. SALAZAR. Because the private sector does not have—this bill does not include any moneys directly to the private sector. And as my colleague Congressman Mark Green said, that we need to be giving incentives to the private sector to attract those American companies that leave China and come to Central America. But you do not have one penny in this \$4 billion package that will do that.

Mr. ZUNIGA. So the money that we are talking about here is money that is for development assistance. There is funding that goes to finance—to prioritize financing. The Development Finance Corporation uses and stimulates private lending, but there is also additional forms of financing that——

Ms. SALAZAR. How much is that? Don't you think that a piece of the 4 billion should be going to incentivize the American companies to come to Central America and absorb that labor force?

Mr. ZUNIGA. At this point, I believe the Development Finance Corporation has over \$1 billion invested in facilitating the economy, in stimulating the economy in Central America, with a focus on small, medium-sized——

Ms. SALAZAR. That is a good start.

Mr. ZUNIGA [continuing]. Business.

Ms. SALAZAR. You know, corruption. We have been talking about corruption. It starts when the police force stops doing its job and loses credibility.

Here is a fact: 66 percent of Hondurans do not have any confidence in their police force. And look at Guatemala. That is the Guatemalan map. Those red dots are land invasions by narcos, and the Guatemalan forces do not have the capacity to go in there. It is the whole country. Did you know about this? I am sure you will.

So this 4 billion package does not include security cooperation agreements. What is that? American advisors, ex-military colonels or military personnel, going and living in those countries and helping train those—I am sure you know this—and helping train the police forces in Guatemala, El Salvador, throughout the whole Central America.

This 4 billion package does not have any of that. So if you—if the police force cannot go save their own people, do you think the NGO's are really going to invest anything or any money in this? So do not you think it would be a good—so did you know about the security cooperation agreements?

Mr. ZUNIGA. So, Representative Salazar, actually, a percentage of the \$4 billion is going to go through State INL, which is intended to support exactly the kind of police units, particularly vetted units that we can trust to help us overcome the very significant threat of transnational organized crime.

And I think you exactly identified the main point here, which is lack of trust in government. And that requires work on behalf of our partners. We think——

Ms. SALAZAR. In simple terms, in which way we, our military, can help and train those police officers or those police forces?

Mr. ZUNIGA. U.S. military cooperation in Central America has been a vital supporter of stability but also governance. And that is going to remain a very important fact of our cooperation. U.S. Southern Command has extensive relationships and uses those to promote exactly the kind of close collaboration and respect for civilian leadership that we support in the United States.

Ms. SALAZAR. But you are not giving them extra funds to expand that program, coming from the Southern Command, in this 4 billion direct cash payments to Central American governments.

Mr. ZUNIGA. So there is security cooperation over which DoD has control through DoD funding, and then you also have basically collaboration between U.S. Southern Command and the work that is done with development dollars.

And just as one example, the U.S. Southern Command also helped build resilience for natural disaster response. They were very active after the hurricanes. In fact, they were the first forces on the ground in Guatemala and Honduras in delivering aid but also in rescuing people, so we have a very close relationship—

Mr. SIRES. Thank you.

Mr. ZUNIGA [continuing]. With them.

Mr. SIRES. Thank you very much.

Ms. SALAZAR. Thank you.

Mr. SIRES. Congressman Vincente Gonzalez, you are on.

Mr. GONZALEZ. Thank you. And thank you to the panel, and thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Folks, I am going to ask you—I have a few questions, so if you can keep your answers as concise as possible.

And I agree with a lot of Representative Salazar just said. The Biden Administration has emphasized the importance of the private sector in creating employment opportunities in the formal sector and contributing to economic growth. For communities in the Northern Triangle, the concern seems to be—in the U.S. is these funds going to corrupt institutions or officials or NGO's that really do not get the job done. We have invested hundreds of millions already, and really we—a lot of us do not see the results.

What are we doing differently this time to be able to measure results and be able to pull the plug on something that is not working earlier on before we go all the way in? Do we have a system in place to where we have expectations, whether it is an NGO or the private sector or whatever government institution we are dealing with, so that does not happen?

Mr. NATIELLO. Thanks for that question, Representative. Just a few quick points on that. As a general rule, at USAID we do not give our funds to foreign governments. That is particularly the case in the Northern Triangle.

Just to put it in perspective, of our Fiscal Year budget of \$311 million, 5.8 million I believe went to governments. That is about 1.6 percent of the total appropriation in 2020.

Again, we work with trusted partners, contractors, NGO's, international organizations like the U.N. that I mentioned earlier. We work through grants and contracts that are subject to audits. The

oversight starts with our field missions in the three countries, and it certainly extends to the USAID inspector general——

Mr. GONZALEZ. So what are we——

Mr. NATIELLO [continuing]. Who watches those and—yes.

Mr. GONZALEZ. What are we doing to check in on them regularly, every so often, to assure we are moving in the right direction? Because we have spent hundreds of millions of dollars in Central America and still I can tell you—I represent a border district, the Rio Grande Valley, that has really been hit hard by the complexities of Central America.

So I would love to see the investments have results, and hopefully calm the migration that we have coming. What are we doing besides getting NGO's and USAID? Do we have a plan in place to have measurable results before we spend all of these billions of dollars that we are committed to, to assure that at the end of the day we have measurable results that have a lasting impact on our southern border?

Mr. NATIELLO. Thank you for that, sir. For all of the investments that we make, we do have performance monitoring plans. We have project managers that monitor regularly those investments. We absolutely take feedback from our monitoring systems and we make adjustments.

I will just give you one quick example. When I got to El Salvador in 2017, we had just cutoff a project in a municipality where the mayor was not keen to work with us, and he was not serious about addressing the challenges that we wanted to address in partnership with him and with his municipality.

More recently, in El Salvador, we took a look at our data. We take a hard look at data on who is migrating and why, and we used that data to shut down one line of effort, which was university partnerships, and we are moving it toward more vocational training for young men, unemployed, victims of violence, in urban areas.

Mr. GONZALEZ. I have a few more questions I would like to ask. The next concern is Honduras. As we know, the present president's brother is serving a life-term sentence here in the United States. I think he has been looking at—he has been looked at, and now we have a candidate, Yani Rosenthal, who spent 4 years in U.S. prison and is—now I believe is indicted.

What are we doing to assure that people like this do not become presidents of these countries?

Mr. ZUNIGA. Thank you very much, Representative Gonzalez. I think it is important here to point out that it is really up to the people of Honduras to elect their leaders, but of course the United States selects who we work with. And as we have made very clear, we are prepared to work with those who are as committed as we are to the fight against corruption and transnational organized crime.

So we respect the elections, but we also have standards for the people that we work with.

Mr. GONZALEZ. Yes. This is obviously a critical concern. And last, and I know we are running out of time, is—and some of you all may know, I have been advocating being on the border, and on border with small municipal communities that cannot—do not have the resources to deal with, you know, the last 173,000 people who

came mostly to my section of the border, has really overwhelmed us and overwhelmed, you know, all our local capacity.

And what I have advocated for is to have the same system that we have in my district in a very humane, clean, first-class American facilities closer to them on the southern Mexican border or the Guatemalan border, because I do not believe this is going to end. I mean, we are talking about climate migration down the road, and maybe other countries down the road.

What are we doing in planning long-term ideas to be able to help folks closer to home and have these processing centers and maybe refugee settlements, or whatever it is to do—to help this mass migration that is coming north, further south, and to keep them from coming through Mexico, which at this time me and my neighboring Congressman calculated that just in the last 90 days cartels have probably been enriched about \$1.2 billion just from the migration that occurred this year.

At \$6,000 a head, at an average of \$6,000 a head that they are charging, I figure that if we had the operations that we have in my district, in cooperation with Mexico or Guatemala or both on that border, and had the same system in place, and whether you are looking for a credible threat or ultimately I envision actually having—being able to have your asylum hearing in safe zones where we can assure their—guarantee their safety, I think we need to start having out-of-the-box ideas or we are going to continue dealing with this on our southern border.

And when I say “doing this in these countries,” I mean doing it in a fashion that is first class, that is respectable, that is humane, that is clean and dignified, no different than as if they came to the United States. And if they have a credible threat, or if they are granted asylum, they can just get in an airplane and fly in and kick the cartels out of this equation.

And with that, I yield back.

Mr. SIRE. Thank you, Congressman.

Do you want to respond to that?

Mr. ZUNIGA. If I could. Congressman, you have exactly defined our effort in Mexico and in northern Central America to build that capacity locally because, among other things, Mexico is no longer just a transit country. It is a destination country.

And we do know that—and, in fact, we have committed significant resources over the last few years working with international organizations to build protect capacity into the immigration systems along the way, and in close collaboration with governments in Mexico and in Central America to do precisely that.

And, as you say, the importance has to be treating people with dignity and giving them access to the resources locally so that they do not feel like they have to transit to the U.S. border.

Thank you.

Mr. GONZALEZ. Thank you. I would—

Mr. SIRE. Lo siento. Sorry.

We now recognize Juan Vargas, who is a member of the committee, and then we will do Mr. Scott Perry.

Mr. VARGAS. Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman. I appreciate, again, the opportunity to speak. I want to thank you for holding

this hearing, and the ranking member of course, as well as the witnesses who have testified here today.

I want to agree with some of the things my colleagues have said on that side of the aisle. I certainly think that China poses the greatest threat for the United States going forward, and I do think that many of the things they are doing in Central America are very damaging, not only to Central Americans but certainly to us.

And I do hope that there are ways for us to bring manufacturing back to the United States. If we cannot bring it back to the United States, Central America, or Mexico, or other places, again, I think that China is our—not only our greatest competitor but our greatest threat. I agree with that—my colleagues on the other side.

I do agree also that many of them who spoke and have great sensitivity and love for the children that are coming and want to take care of them, I agree wholeheartedly with that. But the notion that we have open borders is ridiculous, absolutely ridiculous.

I live on the border. I can tell you we have 60 miles of border in San Diego, linear border. We have 2,200 border patrol agents. In 1993, we had 1,000. If you take a look at some of the apprehensions that we have had, certainly they are high, but nowhere near as high as we had in 1986 and 1996. We had ones that reached up to 1.6 million. The numbers were much, much larger. It all depends on what happens in Central America or Mexico.

We have had, of course, these disasters in Central America. We have had these two giant hurricanes. And something that was brought up just slightly by my colleague, Representative Salazar, I, too, lived in El Salvador for a while. I was a Jesuit at the time studying to be a priest. I was in an orphanage.

I can tell you, during that civil war, 200,000 Guatemalans were killed, most of whom were murdered because they were indigenous people that were supposedly potentially guerillas or guerilla sympathizers. They were murdered by death squads, and they were murdered by the military.

In El Salvador, 70,000 people were killed during that civil war, again, many murdered by death squads, and also by the military, so—including a number of my Jesuit colleagues.

So when you take a look at what is happening in Central America, it has been a disaster. But the notion that this is new, that this has never happened before, is not true. We have had this in our history. I can tell you along—I have lived most of my life along the border in California and Mexico. We have at different times large numbers of migrants coming. That is just the way it has been.

I do want to ask, however, about the issues associated with the two hurricanes and especially in Honduras. It does sound like climate change, the dry areas that they speak of have really been disastrous for Honduras and the rest of the country there, but especially Honduras.

Can someone comment directly on that? Maybe Mr. Zuniga.

Mr. ZUNIGA. Thank you, Representative Vargas, and I should just add, I was with the rector of the University of Central America, Padre Andreu, last week and had an opportunity to speak with him about the work done by the Jesuit community in El Salvador

and the work that they continue to do to promote civil society and human rights in Central America.

With regard to the hurricanes, we are talking about storms that displaced hundreds of thousands of people, that as the chairman noted at the very beginning affected 9 million people in total in Central America over a period of several weeks. That disaster is not over. It continues. There remain tens of thousands of people who are effectively displaced, joining, in the case of Honduras, up to 250,000 people who were already displaced for other causes.

This is the community that is highly at risk, and so this is why we dedicate significant resources to attending to their humanitarian needs as an acute manner. As opposed to being a root cause, this is an acute cause, and we need to focus on victims of disaster now, and that is how we have been directed to dedicate our time and attention. And we are pleased to do that with our colleagues at USAID.

Mr. VARGAS. Any comment from USAID?

Mr. NATIELLO. Yes. Thank you, Representative Vargas, for that question. Just with respect to the Dry Corridor in Honduras, again, we are very focused on that. We work with thousands of farm families there. Our focus has been on management, introducing drip irrigation, diversifying crops, and helping farmers grow crops that have better market opportunities.

And we combine that with nutritional interventions, so that families have a better diet. And, again, we have—just going back to the issue of measuring, when we survey a sample of those farmers and their families, they tell us they are 78 percent less likely to migrate as they see these improvements in their situation than the national average of Hondurans. So that is just one example of the kind of work we are doing in the Dry Corridor.

Thank you.

Mr. VARGAS. Thank you. And just to conclude, I want to thank Mr. Zuniga for mentioning La UCA. La UCA is the Universidad Centroamericana Simeon Canas. They were my superiors when I was there, and the director there was Ignacio Ellacuria, one of the Jesuits who were murdered. They are great people, and thank you for working with them. I appreciate it.

Mr. SIRE. Thank you, Congressman.

We now recognize Scott Perry, Congressman Scott Perry.

Mr. PERRY. Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman, for the opportunity to speak this morning. And congratulations to Mr. Zuniga.

And for many Americans, what seems to be happening or what they believe right now is happening is what appears to them is we are replacing national-born American, native-born Americans to permanently transform the political landscape of this very nation.

The President's policies have led to nearly 19,000—19,000 unaccompanied minors being apprehended last month. That is a 100 percent increase from February.

A 2017 survey conducted by Doctors Without Borders indicates that nearly one-third of all girls and women were sexually abused during their journey to the United States. That is staggering to me. That is staggering to me. Because of this—the Biden-Harris Administration's immigration initiatives that actually encourage disregard for our laws, border traffickers reportedly made \$14-to \$15

million a day. I do not know which one it is. But it is a whole lot of money, and we are encouraging that. We are aiding and abetting that. I find that completely unacceptable.

The human and drug trafficking are a twofold scourge on our Nation, and this Administration's negligence in confronting the exploitation of children—of children. It is disgusting, untenable, unacceptable, and in complete contradiction of our values.

Now, this Administration is proposing taxpayers now pay billions to Central America to stem this tide. While we are talking about resources, let's just talk about what a Border Patrol agent would tell you if you asked them what they need, what they are looking for to do their job, to protect our country. That is a border wall.

On day one of this presidency, this President stopped wall construction, which had an estimated cost of 2-to \$3 billion to terminate all of the construction contracts. Whether this \$4 billion, or whatever it is going to be, is meaningful and successful or not, is immaterial to the fact that we just threw 2 to \$3 billion away for something that does, in some effect, work. Not completely. It is in concert with other things. We just threw that money away.

The sad truth is that border officials encountered 172,000 migrants last month, which is 10 times the figure from April in 2020. I disagree with my good friend from San Diego that this isn't a problem and this hasn't happened before.

Let me ask you this, Mr. Zuniga. Does this Administration consider Mexico an unsafe country?

Mr. ZUNIGA. Mexico, as the authorities in Mexico themselves would tell you, has to contend with a very high level of violence and insecurity. In fact, they dedicate significant resources to contending with precisely that.

Mr. PERRY. So does that mean the Administration—do you consider Mexico an unsafe country?

Mr. ZUNIGA. Mexico has to contend with—

Mr. PERRY. I mean, I am using the term “unsafe country” because, as you probably know, it is definitional regarding policy. So unsafe or not? I mean, I know you—I know I keep saying it, but I am trying to figure out if you are going to say it is unsafe or not.

Mr. ZUNIGA. Representative Perry, Mexico has areas that are safe and areas that are not. It is a large country, and there are areas that are particularly vulnerable to transnational organized crime.

Mr. PERRY. The foreign minister, in September 2019, Ebrard, stated that the trend is irreversible, that we did not need a safe third-party agreement with Mexico because there were less and less people going to the border, due to policy by the way, due to policy, but he said the trend is irreversible, so we do not need a safe third-party agreement, which goes to unsafe or safe.

You are saying it is—well, you are not saying anything. You will say some of it is safe, some of it is unsafe. For the point that it is unsafe, I would ask you, why are we allowing hundreds of foreign nationals from this unsafe country to come into America? And I am sure you know, over 1,000 of people that came in just last month convicted of assault, battery, domestic violence, burglary, robbery, theft, drug possession and trafficking, sexual offenses, some on the terrorism watch list. Why would we allow that?

And if it is not unsafe, and if it is a safe country, then why aren't we enforcing the international standard that refugees who seek asylum in the first safe country—why aren't they doing that in Mexico? And I would just ask you, one or the other.

Mr. ZUNIGA. So, Representative Perry, No. 1, the Administration is committed to enforcing U.S. law and to securing the border. Second, as has been noted, the United States has dedicated resources and worked with Mexican authorities and international organizations to reinforce the ability of Mexican authorities and others to provide security in Mexico and to provide security for those who are in vulnerable situations.

So improving protection capacity, not just in Mexico but in Central America as a whole, is part of the Biden Administration's policy toward Central America.

Mr. PERRY. I yield back. It ain't working, Mr. Chairman.

Mr. SIRES. Thank you.

Congresswoman Sara Jacobs, you are recognized for 5 minutes.

Ms. JACOBS. Thank you, Mr. Chair, and thanks for letting me participate in this subcommittee hearing. I would first like to just associate myself with the comments of my fellow San Diegan, Representative Vargas, about the situation we have in San Diego, and welcome any of my colleagues who would like to come visit us and see.

To our witnesses, thank you for joining us.

I wanted to talk a little bit about violence reduction. You both mentioned in your testimony how important violence was as a push factor, and we know that gang violence is distinct from other forms of conflict but also has a lot of similarities.

So I was just wondering if you both could talk about what you are doing to address violence and what we have learned from other efforts to address violence and conflict in the region.

Mr. ZUNIGA. I will speak briefly, but my colleague from USAID has direct experience in El Salvador where we have managed many of those.

I would say we have actually learned quite a bit over the last few years about how to deal with what is a very deeply embedded social violence in the case of gang violence. It is not just in the case of homicides, which have come down significantly, but also in what people experience in daily life in terms of insecurity and their perception of insecurity. That changes behavior, and it changes the sense of when people feel like they can make their lives and home.

What we found is that there are interventions that are particularly effective, and they are not always, at first glance, what would be popular in communities that have been racked by violence. But interventions like cognitive behavioral therapy, not just with perpetrators but with their families and people who are their victims, it is particularly effective over time.

One thing that we found is that one of the real challenges of gangs, not just in Central America but in many other places, is an inability of people to leave that life. And so looking at it as a phenomenon and not just the crime that happens, but where it comes from, is an important part of finding ways to contend with it, and we have found excellent partners across Central America in helping us deal with this.

It is an intensive approach, but it does yield results. There are others as well, some involving law enforcement, and that is very important. This is not a situation where you can take law enforcement out of the equation. It has to be a part of it, but there also need to be other interventions.

Let me pass this on to my colleague.

Mr. NATIELLO. Thank you. Thank you, Representative Jacobs, for that question. USAID is very engaged in this space, and let me talk about how we work at the national level and then come down to the community levels.

At the national level, we do a lot of work to collect data and evidence on what kind of crimes are occurring and where they are occurring. We share that data. We use that data to bring together policymakers from the three countries, so that they can make smarter policies that address violence. That is at the national level.

We share that data with mayors in the most dangerous municipalities. And then we work closely with those mayors, with the local leaders in those municipalities, to focus even at the neighborhood level, to build community centers and after-school programs for kids, the kind of therapy programs that the Special Envoy mentioned when we find at-risk families.

And I think it is important to note that over time the murder rates in the three countries have gone down considerably. I think in 2013, in El Salvador, the murder rate was 103 people per 100,000 citizens. I think in 2019, it came down to 52, and I think today it is even much lower. So we are seeing impact. We are seeing positive impacts in that space.

And then another key thing that we do as part of these efforts is to take back territorial control from the gangs and from the violent actors. One quick example there, the Cuscatlán Park in the city center of San Salvador, really an emblematic park for that country, was overrun by gangs and violence.

We worked with the mayor, we worked with community leaders, we worked with the private sector, to take that park back. There were 70,000 visitors to that park over the course of the 3 months prior to COVID, and I think about 90 percent of those people said they feel safe in that park.

That is an example of taking space back for citizens, so they can be with their families, they can recreate their communities, and they can envision a better future.

Ms. JACOBS. Well, thank you for that work and the progress. In my last couple of seconds, Mr. Natiello, I was just hoping you could talk about the Partnership for Growth model, if you are planning on bringing it back, or if there are any lessons you are taking from that program to how you are operating in these countries now.

Mr. NATIELLO. So on the Partnership for Growth, I would say that, you know, we will implement the policies of the Biden Administration, and certainly economic growth is critical to address the kind of problems that we have discussed here today. USAID is very engaged with private sector partners and with governments to try to create economic opportunities in these three countries.

We have had some success, but as many have said, this is a long-term challenge that requires us to continue to look for those private sector partnerships, build those conditions for private invest-

ment, so that the jobs can be created particularly for young people in these countries.

Thank you.

Mr. SIRE. Thank you. Thank you again to our witnesses and the members for joining us for this important hearing. Stemming the flow of irregular migration from Central America will require long-term commitment from the United States to deepen our diplomatic and foreign assistance efforts.

I look forward to working closely with my colleagues and the Biden Administration to help foster the necessary political and economic conditions whereby citizens throughout the region can imagine a future in their home country.

With that, the committee is adjourned.

[Whereupon, at 11:55 a.m., the subcommittee was adjourned.]

APPENDIX

**SUBCOMMITTEE HEARING NOTICE
COMMITTEE ON FOREIGN AFFAIRS
U.S. HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES
WASHINGTON, DC 20515-6128**

**Subcommittee on the Western Hemisphere, Civilian Security,
Migration and International Economic Policy**

Albio Sires (D-NJ), Chair

April 14, 2021

TO: MEMBERS OF THE COMMITTEE ON FOREIGN AFFAIRS

You are respectfully requested to attend an OPEN hearing of the Subcommittee on the Western Hemisphere, Civilian Security, Migration and International Economic Policy, to be held in Room 2172 of the Rayburn House Office Building. Members who wish to participate remotely may do so via Cisco WebEx. The hearing will be available via live webcast on the Committee website at <https://foreignaffairs.house.gov/>.

DATE: Wednesday, April 14, 2021

TIME: 10:00 a.m., EDT

SUBJECT: Renewing the United States' Commitment to Addressing the Root Causes of Migration from Central America

LOCATION: 2172 Rayburn House Office Building

WITNESSES: Mr. Ricardo Zúñiga
Special Envoy for the Northern Triangle
U.S. Department of State

The Honorable Peter Natiello
Acting Assistant Administrator
Bureau for Latin America and the Caribbean
U.S. Agency for International Development

By Direction of the Chair

The Committee on Foreign Affairs seeks to make its facilities accessible to persons with disabilities. If you are in need of special accommodations, please call 202/225-5021 at least four business days in advance of the event, whenever practicable. Questions with regard to special accommodations in general (including availability of Committee materials in alternative formats and assistive listening devices) may be directed to the Committee.

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COMMITTEE ON FOREIGN AFFAIRS

Note: Red boxes with red type will NOT print.

MINUTES OF SUBCOMMITTEE ON Western Hemisphere, Civilian Security, Migration and International Economic Policy HEARING

Day Wednesday Date April 14, 2021 Room 2172 RHOB

Starting Time 10:03 am Ending Time 11:54 am

Recesses 0 (____ to ____) (____ to ____) (____ to ____) (____ to ____) (____ to ____) (____ to ____)

Presiding Member(s)

Chair Albio Sires

Check all of the following that apply:

Open Session ☒

Executive (closed) Session ☐

Televised ☒

Electronically Recorded (taped) ☒

Stenographic Record ☒

To select a box, mouse click it, or tab to it and use the enter key to select. Another click on the same box will deselect it.

TITLE OF HEARING:

Renewing the United States' Commitment to Addressing the Root Causes of Migration from Central America

SUBCOMMITTEE MEMBERS PRESENT:

See attached.

NON-SUBCOMMITTEE MEMBERS PRESENT: (Mark with an * if they are not members of full committee.)

Rep. Gregory Meeks, Rep. Michael McCaul, Rep. Sara Jacobs, Rep. Ronnie Jackson, Rep. Scott Perry

HEARING WITNESSES: Same as meeting notice attached? Yes ☒ No ☐

(If "no", please list below and include title, agency, department, or organization.)

STATEMENTS FOR THE RECORD: (List any statements submitted for the record.)

IFR, Green; QFR, Sires, Zuniga; QFR, Sires, Natiello; QFR, Castro; QFR, Jackson; QFR, Spanberger; QFR, Jacobs; QFR, Sires for Torres

TIME SCHEDULED TO RECONVENE _____
or
TIME ADJOURNED 11:54 am

Clear Form

Note: If listing additional witnesses not included on hearing notice, be sure to include title, agency, etc.

[Signature]
Subcommittee Staff Associate

WHEN COMPLETED: Please print for subcommittee staff director's signature and make at least one copy of the signed form. A signed copy is to be included with the hearing/markup transcript when ready for printing along with a copy of the final meeting notice (both will go into the appendix). The signed original, with a copy of the final meeting notice attached, goes to full committee. An electronic copy of this PDF file may be saved to your hearing folder, if desired.

HOUSE COMMITTEE ON FOREIGN AFFAIRS
WHEM SUBCOMMITTEE HEARING

PRESENT	MEMBER
X	Albio Sires, NJ
X	Joaquin Castro, TX
X	Andy Levin, MI
X	Vicente González, TX
X	Juan Vargas, CA

[illegible]

OPENING STATEMENT FROM CHAIRMAN SIRES

House Committee on Foreign Affairs
Western Hemisphere Subcommittee

Chairman Albio Sires (D-NJ)

Opening Statement – “Renewing the United States’ Commitment to Addressing the Root Causes of
Migration from Central America”
Wednesday, April 14, 2021

- Good morning everyone and thank you to our witnesses for being here today.
- I am thrilled that we have two experienced witnesses with us to discuss how to strengthen U.S. policy and foreign assistance toward Central America.
- I believe our goal should be to ensure that every individual throughout Central America has the chance to achieve a life of dignity and opportunity in their home country.
- Only then will we be able to solve the challenge of irregular migration.
- I know from speaking with both of our witnesses that they come to this hearing with proposals for how to do this but also eager to hear ideas from our members on what we can do better.
- To me, this is what the relationship between Congress and the executive branch should look like.
- We are here to work together on a bipartisan basis to achieve the best policy outcomes for the American people.
- I have been working on these issues long enough to know that success in this effort will not be achieved overnight.
- It will take many years of sustained effort.
- I applaud President Biden for sending a clear message at the start of his administration that this issue is a priority and that he and Vice President Harris are ready to invest the necessary time and resources to achieve real progress.
- As we all know, this hearing comes at a moment when border arrivals are once again on the rise.
- Our immigration system is in dire need of reform.
- But the purpose of today’s hearing is to look south of the border at the issues that are forcing people to flee their homes.
- My experience from traveling many times to the region is that most individuals who make this journey know that it is dangerous.

- They also know that it is unlikely they will be granted entry into the United States.
- But they are so desperate to escape that they take the costly and dangerous trip anyway.
- Violence, impunity, inequality, and the impacts of climate change are among the many push factors driving this trend.
- Hurricanes Eta and Iota hit Honduras, Guatemala, and Nicaragua extremely hard at the end of last year, impacting as many as nine million people in Central America.
- In San Pedro Sula alone, hundreds of thousands of people were forced into temporary shelters after their homes were flooded.
- This devastation is clearly contributing to the current wave of migration and I welcome U-S-AID's announcement last week that it has deployed a disaster response team to address food insecurity and other humanitarian needs in the region.
- I also urge the U.S. Government to prioritize Central America in future efforts to distribute excess vaccines and provide resources to help countries buy COVID-19 vaccines directly.
- As the U.S. Government takes a longer-term and more holistic approach to addressing migration, I believe that promoting democratic governance and human rights must be central.
- We need to tackle corruption.
- We saw progress in Guatemala and Honduras when the international community provided backing and protection to courageous domestic prosecutors.
- The anti-corruption mission in Guatemala helped reduce homicides by five percent annually during the ten-year period in which it operated.
- It showed that reducing corruption directly advances all of our other policy goals.
- Unfortunately, there are economic and political elites in these countries who will fight tooth and nail to protect the status quo.
- In Honduras, after the international mission helped convict prominent officials like the former first lady, President Hernandez and the Honduran Congress fought back by ending its mandate and pushing through a new criminal code to reduce corruption sentences.

- In Guatemala, corrupt officials were emboldened after they ended the mandate of the CICIG.
- Now they are trying to hijack the judicial selection process and capture the constitutional court.
- We cannot respond to these setbacks by throwing our arms in the air.
- We should redouble our support for those investigating and prosecuting high-level corruption.
- That is why I included language in the Northern Triangle Enhanced Engagement Act, which was led by former Chairman Engel and Ranking Member McCaul and was passed into law last year, to sanction officials who obstruct corruption investigations or seek to harass or intimidate anti-corruption investigators.
- We also need to support local civil society organizations.
- In general, U.S. assistance should support bottom-up solutions that are driven by local leaders.
- The Inter-American Foundation provides one excellent model for this kind of work.
- We must also reinforce our foreign assistance with strategic diplomacy.
- Ambassador Popp is doing a great job in Guatemala.
- We urgently need Senate-confirmed ambassadors like him in El Salvador and Honduras who are deeply committed to combating corruption and protecting human rights.
- Expanding lawful pathways for Central Americans to work in the United States, particularly through the H-2 visa program, should also be a part of our regional strategy.
- I will close my remarks by addressing an issue that threatens to undermine our efforts to engage constructively with countries in Central America.
- In recent weeks, Salvadoran government officials have attempted to discredit individual members of the United States Congress or to use disinformation to misrepresent individual members' views.
- Unfortunately, this campaign to manipulate public perception has been supported by millions of dollars in payments to U.S. lobbyists.
- Members of Congress are receiving death threats and harassment as a result.

- Recently, it escalated to the point where El Salvador's head of state urged a member of Congress' constituents to vote her out of office and disseminated conspiracy theories supported by her political opponents.
- This is foreign election interference.
- If it continues, we will confront it as a national security threat to the United States.
- During his short time in office, President Bukele has achieved a historic reduction in violent crime.
- Maybe more importantly, he has given many Salvadorans hope and he deserves credit for that.
- But diplomacy is not a one-way street.
- Exposure to criticism is one of the burdens of leadership.
- Trust me, I have gotten plenty of it in my fifteen years in Congress.
- I have spent my time in Congress advocating for closer U.S. engagement with countries throughout Latin America and the Caribbean because I care deeply about the people in this region and I believe wholeheartedly in the capacity and autonomy of the people in this region.
- I want to promote U.S. interests while lifting up our neighbors throughout the Western Hemisphere.
- This can only be done if we engage with one another in good faith about the issues where we agree and those where we see things differently.
- Let's commit to fostering a culture of integrity, decency, and mutual respect.
- That is what all of our constituents deserve.
- Thank you, and I now turn to Ranking Member Green for his opening statement.

Dimensions of the Migration Crisis



Solving the Migration Crisis

Address Crime and Corruption Create Job opportunities	Reinstate agreements with Mexico at their southern border Reinstate agreements to hold in Mexico	Reinstate barriers to entry Address court date issue
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RESPONSES TO QUESTIONS SUBMITTED FOR THE RECORD

**Questions for the Record Submitted to
Special Envoy for the Northern Triangle Ricardo Zúñiga by
Chairman Albio Sires (# 1-11)
House Foreign Affairs Committee;
Subcommittee on the Western Hemisphere, Civilian Security, Migration and International
Economic Policy
April 14, 2021**

Question 1:

Ambassador Roberta Jacobson recently said that only a small percentage of assistance would go to central governments. Do you expect that this assistance will require governments to meet certain conditions? If so, what do you think those conditions should be?

Answer 1:

Assistance provided to governments is subject to conditions established by the United States and vary according to the program and beneficiary. The Department intends to hold Central American governments accountable to robust but achievable benchmarks related to combatting corruption and impunity, supporting independent electoral and judicial institutions, increasing government transparency, protecting human rights, reducing poverty and promoting equitable economic opportunity, providing effective and accountable law enforcement, improving border security, combatting human smuggling and trafficking, countering organized crime, and informing their citizens of the dangers of irregularly migrating to the U.S. southern border. Flexibility remains important as we pursue the full range of U.S. national interests in each country. We look forward to working with Congress on establishing appropriate conditions related to our foreign assistance in the region.

Question 2:

If assistance to Northern Triangle central governments will face conditionality requirements, how can the administration and Congress work to ensure that the process of certification is not politicized, as has happened in the past, and is instead based on established benchmarks of progress?

Answer 2:

The Department will closely consult with Congress about our Central America engagement, including about certifications to hold Central American governments to account. We will engage in dialogue with Congress regarding the context in which we are delivering assistance and monitoring implementation to ensure compliance, as well as any challenges related to such oversight. We will consult with Congress on the benchmarks we plan to employ to gauge progress for assistance related to governance, security, and economic development. Conditionality requirements that track these benchmarks will be helpful as we encourage countries to reform.

Question 3:

Do you believe certification requirements have been helpful in the past in contributing to policy changes in the target countries?

Answer 3:

It is vital that we hold governments accountable for the long-term, systemic reforms needed to address the root causes of irregular migration. It is useful for aid recipients to understand that both the U.S. Congress and the executive branch require compliance with commitments consistent with U.S. national interests and that safeguard taxpayer resources. The Department will consult with Congress on the appropriate scope of certification requirements.

Question 4:

What recommendations do you have for Congress to improve conditionality requirements to make them useful in advancing the kinds of changes we would like to see?

Answer 4:

The Department intends to seek the right balance to both achieve accountability and preserve flexibility to respond to opportunities and challenges as we work to address the root causes of irregular migration. It would be useful for Congress and the Department to discuss potential options for meeting those twin objectives of accountability and flexibility.

Question 5:

Would you view favorably a more detailed and clearly laid out set of conditionality requirements, whereby a country could be partially certified for making progress in specific areas but not certified for failing to make progress in other areas?

Answer 5:

Yes, such a framework would be potentially conducive to the effective implementation of certification requirements. The Department would welcome increased flexibility in some areas of existing conditionality requirements as we work to address the root causes of irregular migration. The Department also looks forward to working with Congress to ensure we find the right balance of accountability and flexibility for our engagement and increased assistance to promote substantive reforms.

Question 6:

Will the Biden administration's strategy for Central America include an inter-agency monitoring and evaluation plan that includes time-bound metrics to measure progress and adapt programming accordingly?

Answer 6:

The Department would welcome an opportunity to discuss with Congress our initial considerations and the work of the Department and USAID to re-examine the execution of assistance with a view to ensuring greater efficacy.

Question 7:

What challenges exist in ensuring monitoring and evaluation best practices are followed in U.S.-funded activities?

Answer 7:

While our assistance programs have a robust monitoring and evaluation framework, the external data necessary to assess the larger impact of our programs is sometimes lacking. For instance, Central American countries do not routinely track data on the demographics of victims of gender-based violence or internal displacement. Our technical assistance can help bolster capacity to improve data collection, which can assist in our monitoring efforts. We will also incorporate a variety of approaches, methods, and data sources to generate robust and specific evidence for strategy decision making and results tracking.

Question 8:

How would you evaluate the current Northern Triangle offices working on corruption investigations and prosecutions, such as Guatemala's FECI, Honduras' UFERCO, and El Salvador's attorney general? Do you consider them allies in our shared fight against corruption and, if so, how does the U.S. plan to support them?

Answer 8:

The Administration supports special anti-impunity and anticorruption prosecutorial units across the region, including the Special Prosecutor's Office Against Impunity (FECI) in Guatemala, Special Prosecutor's Unit against Corruption Networks (UFERCO) in Honduras, International Commission against Impunity in El Salvador (CICIES), and regional attorneys general. These organizations have shown some success in prosecuting corruption but face significant challenges to their work, including spurious legal charges, interference, and lack of sufficient budget, technical resources, and independence. The Department will continue to provide assistance that strengthens the independent capacity of such institutions and bolsters key offices, justice institutions, and individuals committed to combating corruption and impunity. We will continue to advocate for their independence and urge host governments to provide them with sufficient resources.

Question 9:

How does the Biden administration envision implementing the newly-announced Northern Triangle Task Force to tackle corruption as a root cause for migration from Central America? Specifically, how would a regional mechanism work with domestic prosecutors in each country to investigate cases and secure corruption convictions?

Answer 9:

The Administration believes bolstering democratic governance and strengthening anticorruption efforts are key to addressing the root causes of irregular migration from Central America. We are committed to working to combat corruption by sharing anticorruption expertise from across the U.S. government, to include the Departments of State and Justice, USAID, and other agencies, with local prosecutors and anticorruption bodies. The Administration is committed to strengthening the justice sector at the local level, and creating a regional anti-corruption task force, and we will seek commitments from regional governments for this effort. Through increased coordination of USG advisors in El Salvador, Guatemala, and Honduras, regional anticorruption efforts will amplify national capacity building by bringing legislation and domestic codes in line with international standards, improving anticorruption investigation and prosecution capacity in each country, and collaborating anticorruption investigations and best practices across the three countries.

Question 10:

Do you agree with many U.S. Government implementing partners who have suggested that the 2019 assistance cuts set us back in terms of responding to the coronavirus and the humanitarian crisis that arose from Hurricanes Eta and Iota in the Northern Triangle?

Answer 10:

I would agree that the 2019 assistance reprogramming hampered our response to the COVID-19 pandemic, the humanitarian crisis that arose from Hurricanes Eta and Iota, and the growing food insecurity crises. We are working diligently to support our Central American neighbors as they tackle these multiple crises by helping them increase their resilience and capacity to respond to future disasters.

Question 11:

How did the assistance cuts impact the advances that U.S. assistance had made in economic prosperity, violence reduction, and governance?

Answer 11:

The reprogramming of assistance had a significant impact on our ability to meet our foreign assistance objectives in the region. It disrupted programs that, in some cases, were just beginning to have a positive impact across our three main areas of work related to economic opportunity, security, and governance. In other cases, funds for monitoring and evaluation were among the funds that were cut, hampering our ability to evaluate the efficacy of programs that were underway or had been completed. Our programs have had a positive impact in communities across Central America, including by helping reduce violence, improve protection for victims of gender-based violence, and provide economic opportunity. Our partners have welcomed the return of U.S. assistance and noted the importance of our leadership in these critical areas.

Questions for the Record
from Chairman Sires to Acting Assistant Administrator Natiello
“Renewing the United States’ Commitment to Addressing to
Root Causes of Migration from Central America”
Wednesday, April 14, 2021

1. Monitoring and Evaluation of U.S. Programs: A 2019 report by the U.S. Government Accountability Office found that limited information was available about how U.S. assistance improved prosperity, governance, and security in the Northern Triangle in part because evaluations were not conducted consistently. Additionally, the monitoring and evaluation plan for implementation of programs within the U.S. Strategy for Engagement in Central America was not applied consistently throughout all implementing agencies such as the Department of Defense or the Department of Agriculture. A recent Wilson Center report interviewed observers and implementers who expressed frustration that foreign assistance is too focused on outputs and not sufficiently focused on outcomes and impacts.

- Will the Biden administration’s strategy for Central America include an inter-agency monitoring and evaluation plan with clear, time-bound metrics to measure progress and adapt programming accordingly?

Answer:

The forthcoming strategy on addressing the root causes of irregular migration will include a Monitoring, Evaluation, and Learning Plan (MEL) Plan. USAID continually strives to improve the measurable impact of our programming in Central America, as well as the quality of data we collect that drives our decision-making. We anticipate that the MEL Plan for the strategy will incorporate a variety of approaches, methods, and data sources to generate robust and specific evidence for strategy decision making and results tracking. This is consistent with our significant efforts, over many years, to develop comprehensive and informative tools to ensure that we have state-of-the-art plans for monitoring, evaluation, and learning (MEL) in place throughout the Agency.

We are already working with our implementing partners on collecting data against indicators related to the migration experiences, attitudes, and intentions of participants in the programs we fund in the countries of the Northern Triangle of Central America. These indicators are helping USAID and our implementers target and monitor better the direct impact of our programs on deterring irregular migration to the United States. In addition and as a standard program management practice, USAID analyzes data on the drivers of migration and irregular migration, including data from the U.S. Customs and Border Protection (CBP), the International Organization for Migration (IOM), Vanderbilt University’s Latin America Public Opinion Project (LAPOP), and others. The data informs strategy and program management decisions.

- What challenges exist in ensuring monitoring and evaluation best practices are followed in U.S.-funded activities?

Answer:

While our assistance programs have a robust monitoring and evaluation framework, the external data necessary to assess the larger impact of our programs is sometimes lacking. For instance, Central American countries do not routinely track data on the demographics of victims of gender-based violence or internal displacement. Our technical assistance can help bolster capacity to improve data collection, which can assist in our monitoring efforts.

2. Place-Based Strategy and other Violence Reduction Approaches: In El Salvador and Honduras, USAID and the State Department's Bureau of International Narcotics Law Enforcement have worked together through a Place-Based Strategy, integrating INL policing initiatives with USAID prevention programs, while focusing on municipalities that were targeted by those governments' own security strategies. From 2015 to 2017, our assistance helped reduce homicide rates in El Salvador by 61% in the targeted municipalities, compared to a 42% reduction nationwide, according to USAID. However, a recent Wilson Center report stated that these place-based development strategies had seemed promising "but were not fully tested in practice."

- Given your work on the ground in El Salvador, what do you believe has worked and what has not worked in our crime and violence prevention programming in the region and what strategies would you recommend going forward?

Answer:

Our programming is most effective when the various elements of effective crime and violence prevention programming focus on changing risky behaviors of the right type of people, in the most violent places.

This requires working at multiple levels aimed at preventing youth from progressing from low- to high-risk behavior, which are proximate determinants of violence and delinquency. These multiple levels include: 1) Primary prevention that targets risk factors within the general population, namely youth between ages 10-29 years old; 2) Secondary prevention that targets risk factors that are at higher risk of becoming perpetrators or victims of violence in the future; 3) Tertiary prevention that targets individuals that are already engaged in violent behavior; and 4) Suppression and relational policing within the realm of law enforcement action and responses. We have learned that secondary and tertiary prevention is most likely to have larger impacts that are directly connected to crime and violence indicators and have increased our work in these areas.

In secondary prevention, USAID worked with experts from Los Angeles to adapt a focused family intervention and counseling approach for youth who demonstrate a heightened risk for violent and criminal behavior. Through these efforts, USAID supported more than 3,000 youth in Honduras and El Salvador who were very likely on the path toward criminal and violent behavior. These efforts saw a 77% reduction in risk among participating youth in schools in El Salvador.

In tertiary prevention, USAID identifies youth in conflict with the law so that we can channel them away from the adult system, which could see minors held in jail for up to two years before they even go to trial. Even while we acknowledge that this is an uphill battle, we know this kind

of approach works at reducing levels of violence, because we've seen progress. For example, a pilot project that provided evidence-based support to youth offenders in Honduras resulted in a 4% rate of recidivism among those receiving the support, compared with a national recidivism rate of 45%. However, USAID's programming in tertiary prevention is still in nascent stages of implementation and evaluation. We're committed to doing all that we can to help reduce crime and violence, within existing legal restrictions.

3. Disaster Assistance Response Team and Response Management Team: On April 6, USAID's Bureau for Humanitarian Assistance activated a Disaster Assistance Response Team (DART) and Response Management Team (RMT) to lead the U.S. Government's response to humanitarian needs affecting Honduras, Guatemala, and El Salvador resulting from recurring drought, Hurricanes Eta and Iota, and the COVID-19 pandemic.

- What considerations led to the decision to activate the DART and RMT in Guatemala, Honduras, and El Salvador?

Answer:

When the size, scope, or complexity of a disaster requires it, USAID's Bureau for Humanitarian Assistance will send a DART to crisis-affected areas.

To help mitigate the impact of recurrent drought, severe food insecurity, and the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic in the region, USAID deployed the DART to respond to urgent humanitarian needs in Guatemala, Honduras, and El Salvador.

In the last year, the number of people in need of humanitarian aid in these countries has increased more than 75 percent. Now, because of the impacts of COVID-19, consecutive years of drought, severe food insecurity, and back-to-back hurricanes last November, more than ten million people are in need of humanitarian assistance.

Since 2017, the number of people in El Salvador, Guatemala, and Honduras who suffer from acute food insecurity has increased from approximately 1 million to more than 5 million. As we have seen food insecurity rise, we have realized that these are acute humanitarian needs, and are responding.

- Is additional funding being obligated for this emergency assistance?

Answer:

The DART that USAID deployed on April 6 is currently focused on assessing humanitarian needs and coordinating with partners and local officials to build on USAID's current humanitarian programs in the region and bring speed and scale to quickly reach even more people with life-saving assistance.

Based on their assessments and the information USAID/BHA receives from its UN and NGO partners in the region, we will determine how additional assistance can be used to provide urgently needed aid to crisis-affected families and communities.

- How will USAID's DART and RMT complement USAID's existing programming focused on addressing immediate humanitarian needs in the Northern Triangle?

Answer:

USAID/BHA already has active humanitarian programs in all three countries. Over the last five years, USAID has provided nearly \$151 million in humanitarian assistance to these three countries. Many programs supported by this funding are ongoing and focused on supporting emergency food assistance, COVID-19 interventions, Hurricanes Iota and Eta response efforts, and disaster risk reduction activities.

USAID deployed a DART that will build on these programs and bring speed and scale to quickly reach even more people with life-saving assistance. This team will be assessing humanitarian needs, coordinating with partners and local officials, and providing urgently needed aid to crisis-affected families and communities.

USAID's humanitarian assistance programs are designed to meet immediate, life-saving needs. Other forms of assistance in the region are focused on addressing the root causes and drivers of migration.

4. Continued Impact of Cutting Assistance to the Northern Triangle: After President Trump's misguided 2019 decision to cut assistance to Northern Triangle countries, several USAID activities had to end early or close down without being replaced. Many implementing partners had to fire staff or leave altogether. Despite the resumption of funding last year, scaling programming back up takes time.

- How did the funding cuts reduce the number of program beneficiaries of USAID programming in Guatemala and Honduras?

Answer:

The reprogramming of assistance had a significant impact on our ability to meet our foreign assistance objectives in the region. It disrupted programs that, in some cases, were just beginning to have a positive impact across our three main areas of work related to economic opportunity, security, and governance. For example, between April 2019 and May 2020, the number of individuals receiving assistance through our humanitarian assistance programs in Guatemala and Honduras decreased by 60 percent. In Honduras, the number of USAID beneficiaries declined from about 1.5 million to about 575,000 between March 2019 and March 2020. In other cases, funds for monitoring and evaluation were among the funds that were cut, hampering our ability to evaluate the efficacy of programs that were underway or had been completed. Our programs have had a positive impact in communities across Central America, including by helping reduce violence, improve protection for victims of gender-based violence, and provide economic opportunity. Our partners have welcomed the return of U.S. assistance and noted the importance of our leadership in these critical areas.

- Do you agree with many U.S. Government implementing partners who have suggested that the 2019 assistance cuts set us back in terms of responding to the coronavirus and the humanitarian crisis that arose from Hurricanes Eta and Iota in the Northern Triangle?

Answer:

The impacts of COVID-19 and the recent hurricanes have further exacerbated already precarious humanitarian conditions in the Northern Triangle. Many needs in the region went unmet during the absence of U.S. funding and strong support from other donors. USAID provided \$11 million in COVID-19 supplemental funding to NGO implementing partners in the Northern Triangle in FY20 beginning in July 2020. With these funds, partners implemented a range of COVID prevention and response activities, which included training health workers on infection prevention and control protocols, distributing hygiene supplies, sharing key information on the disease, and providing psychosocial support. USAID also began sub-obligating FY17 funds that had been frozen under the President's directive. USAID deployed a Disaster Assistance Response Team (DART) which was on the ground for nearly a month to lead U.S. Hurricane Eta and Iota response efforts. USAID provided emergency shelter, food assistance, hygiene supplies, and protection services.

These programs are ongoing and we continue to assess humanitarian needs so we can best help families and communities as they continue to recover from these storms. The needs in the region continue to be daunting, especially as the countries grapple with COVID-19 and the hurricanes occurring in November 2020. USAID is now moving expeditiously to scale up programs in Central America to meet immediate needs.

- How did the assistance cuts impact the advances that U.S. assistance had made in economic prosperity, violence reduction, and governance?

Answer:

Prior to the funding suspension USAID had tailored programs targeting likely migrants and the places from which they were leaving. Some of those programs were suspended, reduced in scope, or closed before their planned end dates. Engagement with key institutions were also suspended during this period which caused an impact in the relationship and trust that had been built over time.

However, the expertise and structures in place to get back to the robust programs still remain. It will take time to ramp back up, but USAID is focused on ensuring that our Missions in El Salvador, Guatemala, and Honduras have adequate program resources, the human resources, and procurement ability to effectively deliver results and ensure proper oversight of programs.

- How has USAID scaled programming back up once funding began to flow again, given the challenging operating context due to COVID-19?

Answer:

USAID is working aggressively to address the economic, security, and governance challenges that undermine progress in El Salvador, Guatemala, and Honduras. Building on a foundation of efforts dating to 2015 under the Obama Administration, USAID is working intensively to ramp

up our programs in all three countries to address the drivers of irregular migration. New and expanded efforts include:

- Providing opportunities to those most likely to migrate, including at-risk youth, victims of crime and violence, and the rural poor. These programs will include job training, education and scholarship initiatives, and outreach programs in high-crime areas, as well as agriculture and food security assistance in rural areas.
- Ramping up activities to increase access to justice, reduce impunity and corruption, and support local governments and civil society to ensure that governments respond to citizen needs.
- Encouraging legal migration by helping workers in the Northern Triangle who are interested in seasonal employment to register with and be vetted by their governments, connect with employers in the United States, and obtain an H2 visa for legal entry into the United States.
- Linking returned migrants to USAID programs to help them reintegrate into their communities, helping to reduce recidivism of irregular migrants. USAID will provide workforce training and job placement, school reintegration, health programming, and psychosocial counseling.

Moving forward, the Administration's FY 2022 budget request includes \$861 million for the State Department and USAID as a first step toward a four-year commitment of \$4 billion, subject to the availability of appropriations, to sustain effective regional partnerships, strengthen government accountability, and address the root causes of irregular migration from Central America. With these funds, USAID will:

- Expand support for programs focused on anti-corruption, human rights, and poverty reduction, including agriculture and health.
- Increase programming to counter violence, including gender-based violence, and expand economic development.
- Expand opportunities for education and training and drive economic growth throughout the region.

USAID is working now to prepare for a potential increase in future funding, both with flexible procurements and human resources to ensure we have the capabilities to responsibly manage an increase in funding.

**Questions for the Record submitted to
Special Envoy for the Northern Triangle Ricardo Zúniga
by Representative Joaquin Castro
House Foreign Affairs Committee;
Subcommittee on the Western Hemisphere, Civilian Security, Migration and International
Economic Policy,
April 14, 2021**

As you know, UN-backed Comisión Internacional contra la Impunidad en Guatemala, known as CICIG, was one of the most trusted institutions in Guatemala and played an important role in ensuring accountability in the country. Then-Vice President Biden played a key role in getting the CICIG set up and was a strong supporter of the institution. However, it was, unfortunately, kicked out of Guatemala after the last administration effectively pulled support for it.

President Biden has since called for creating a "regional commission to fight corruption, build more robust domestic institutions, and help local prosecutors pursue corruption" to build on the successful CICIG model. I think a regional organization, modeled on CICIG, is an excellent idea.

Question 1:

What is the administration doing to make this a reality and how can Congress help?

Answer 1:

The Administration believes bolstering democratic governance and strengthening anticorruption efforts are key to addressing the root causes of irregular migration from Central America. We are committed to working to combat corruption by sharing anticorruption expertise from across the U.S. government, to include the Departments of State and Justice, USAID, and other agencies, with local prosecutors and anticorruption bodies. CICIG and a similar mission overseen by the OAS in Honduras demonstrated that the model of providing international support for host government judicial and police officials committed to combatting corruption can be highly effective. The Administration will continue to support special anti-impunity and anticorruption prosecutorial units within offices of Attorneys General across the region, including the Special Prosecutor's Office Against Impunity (FECI) and the Prosecutorial Unit Against Organized Crime in Guatemala. The State Department is contributing to this effort by supporting Department of Justice cooperation with host government counterparts and is exploring how to expand this work. We will also work to strengthen civil society actors who advocate for greater transparency and more robust anticorruption measures. The Administration will coordinate these efforts closely with Congress.

Question 2:

CICIG was backed by the UN. Its Honduran counterpart, MACCIH, was backed by the OAS. What role can international organizations play here to ensure there is accountability?

Answer 2:

The Administration is open to all mechanisms that increase transparency, combat corruption, promote human rights, and strengthen good governance. It is important to develop local capacity to make government institutions effective, transparent, and accountable to their citizens. To that end, we are committed to working to combat corruption by sharing anticorruption expertise from across the U.S. government, to include the Departments of State and Justice, USAID, and other agencies, with local prosecutors and anticorruption bodies. It is equally important to provide political support for public servants in Central America with the will and the capacity to combat corruption and impunity. The Administration is willing to work regionally, bilaterally, multilaterally, and even unilaterally to root out corruption and enhance transparency across the region. We look forward to continuing to consult Congress on these efforts.

Question 3:

Can you explain in detail the relationship between the root causes of migration and the COVID-19 pandemic?

Answer 3:

The COVID-19 pandemic reduced irregular migration to the United States in the immediate term; however, the pandemic turned 2020's projected economic growth into economic contraction across Central America. As the U.S. economy expands and the pandemic-induced contraction in the region continues, it is likely contributing to some Central Americans' decision to migrate in search of opportunities in the United States. Central Americans working in the formal economy at home have shown to be less likely to irregularly migrate. Additionally, as countries around the world imposed movement restrictions and quarantine measure to combat the pandemic, some communities, including some in Central America, which unfortunately saw an increase in reports of domestic violence. Domestic violence contributes to a climate of insecurity that serves as one of several push factors of migration.

Question 4:

Do you believe that sharing our nation's excess vaccines with the people of Central America should be part of the holistic approach to address the root causes of migration?

Answer 4:

The United States is examining every means by which we can assist Central American countries' access to vaccines, but our first priority must remain vaccinating the U.S. population. The United States has provided an initial \$2 billion to Gavi in support of COVAX, and through USAID, is currently providing \$7 million for COVID-19 vaccine support to El Salvador, Guatemala, and Honduras. We are also working to support an expansion of global manufacturing capacity for safe and effective COVID-19 vaccines to get more shots out the door and into people's arms as fast as possible. The United States is looking at options to share U.S. AstraZeneca doses with other countries as they become available, and only after FDA approval.

Question 5:

Can you describe the role of the UN in supporting refugees in the U.S.-Mexico border?

Answer 5:

International organization partners including the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), the International Organization for Migration (IOM), and UNICEF are active in Mexico, including in the northern border region, to provide humanitarian assistance to vulnerable populations including asylum seekers and refugees. As it does in countries around the world, UNHCR also supports the Government of Mexico to strengthen its asylum system and build refugee hosting capacity, and provides direct assistance to support durable solutions for refugees through local integration. PRM has provided more than \$165 million for humanitarian support in Mexico from FY 2017-2021, via UNHCR and other partners, including assistance that helped Mexico's refugee agency nearly triple its annual asylum claim processing capacity.

Question 6:

Given the increased need to receive and process refugees in the southern border, how can the United States work with the UN to strengthen its capacity to assist refugees?

Answer 6:

As articulated in a series of February 2 Executive Orders, repairing our asylum system, including reintroducing access to asylum at our southern border, is a top priority for President Biden, but change will take time. The Administration is committed to restoring safe and orderly access to asylum while continuing to prioritize public health and national security. For additional details about the U.S. asylum system, which is distinct from the U.S. Refugee Admissions Program (USRAP), we would refer you to the Department of Homeland Security.

USRAP is overseen and funded by the Department of State's Bureau of Population, Refugees, and Migration. The UN Refugee Agency (UNHCR) is and has been a reliable partner in Central America for refugee resettlement and we continue to jointly explore options to expand their capacity to refer Central Americans with protection needs to USRAP.

**Questions for the Record Submitted by Representative Ronny Jackson
House Foreign Affairs Committee;
Subcommittee on the Western Hemisphere, Civilian Security, Migration and International
Economic Policy
April 14, 2021**

Questions for Special Envoy for the Northern Triangle Ricardo Zúniga

1. I am also concerned about the under-publicized role that criminals and cartels have during this crisis. In FY 2021 to date, the U.S. Customs and Border Protection (CBP) has already arrested over 5,000 individuals with criminal convictions, more than double the number arrested in all of FY 2020. These criminals include those guilty of assault and domestic violence, illegal drug possession and trafficking, and sexual offenses. Additionally, cartels charge vulnerable families to get their children into the U.S. illegally and put these children in even greater danger. Furthermore, illegal immigrants I spoke with at the Carrizo Springs influx facility made the point that their families will never be able to pay the cartels for bringing them and acknowledged they will have to pay off their debt by working for the cartels while in the U.S.

Can you discuss the role that cartels are currently playing in this crisis? And what are we doing to make sure we are not condemning these young men in particular to a life of crime working for the cartels and assisting the cartels with their criminal enterprises here in the U.S.?

Answer:

We are concerned about reports of criminals profiting from the smuggling of migrants through Mexico and across the U.S. border as well as from the exploitation of migrants in forced labor or sex trafficking en-route to or upon arrival in the United States. Transnational criminal organizations (TCOs) have repeatedly demonstrated their ability to adapt their business model and diversify their criminal activities to include preying on vulnerable populations through smuggling, sex and labor trafficking, extortion, and kidnapping.

U.S. assistance programs in Mexico build the capacity of Mexico's security and justice sector institutions to target, investigate, and prosecute TCOs and those profiting from human trafficking and migrant smuggling, among other illicit activities. U.S. programs professionalize Mexican police, investigators, and prosecutors, while ensuring human rights are respected, with the aim to reduce impunity for crime linked to TCOs. Our programs also train Mexican officials on protocols to identify and assist victims of trafficking; support the development of a model for shelters for victims of trafficking in persons; and support training, including case mentoring, for prosecutors and officials addressing trafficking in persons and migrant smuggling crimes.

The United States is committed to working with the Mexican and Central American governments to ensure a safe, orderly, and humane migration system; expand access to protection; inform migrants of the dangers of using smugglers; and address the root causes of irregular migration while countering and preventing violence, extortion, exploitation, and other crimes perpetrated by TCOs.

2. Do you think direct payments to non-citizens is a fair use of the money that hard-working American taxpayers earn, particularly in a time of economic hardship for many? Also, what would stop someone from receiving the money, then still leaving to attempt to enter the U.S.

afterwards, and how could the U.S. government track the recipients of this money to ensure American taxpayer dollars are being used?

Answer:

The Department and USAID carefully design and target foreign assistance programs to alleviate the conditions driving irregular migration to the United States and to meet urgent, immediate humanitarian needs for vulnerable populations. This includes monitoring and evaluation activities to ensure robust oversight of U.S. assistance. The ability to adapt our assistance to address current circumstances and challenges remains important as we respond to humanitarian, development, economic, and security needs in the region.

The humanitarian community and USAID commonly use cash and voucher assistance, among other tools in our toolbox, to deliver humanitarian aid around the world. When local markets are functioning and goods are available, cash and vouchers can be a fast, cost-efficient way to help people facing humanitarian need get food, shelter, water and other necessities. For example, USAID's humanitarian programs to respond to the devastation caused by Hurricanes Iota and Eta include cash and voucher assistance, run by trusted UN and NGO partners. Small amounts—around \$100 a month per family in most cases—help these families purchase foods to feed their families or basic necessities. Such assistance helps people stay in their communities.

Questions for Acting Assistant Administrator Natiello

Question:

Three weeks ago, Vice President Kamala Harris was appointed the Border Czar. Since then, she has made four trips: to a yarn shop in Virginia, a water facility in Northern California, a bakery in Illinois, and a non-profit in Connecticut.

What does it say about Vice President Harris' commitment to the health and national security crisis at the southern border that she has not made the trip to visit?

Answer:

Thank you for your question. We defer to the National Security Council and Office of the Vice President.

Question:

Also, in your opinion, how would it boost the morale of the exhausted and overworked law enforcement officers at the border to receive a visit from and get to brief their Commander-in-Chief or Vice President?

Answer:

Thank you for your question. We defer to the National Security Council and Office of the Vice President.

**Questions for the Record Submitted from Representative Abigail Spanberger
House Foreign Affairs Committee;
Subcommittee on the Western Hemisphere, Civilian Security, Migration, and International
Economic Policy,
April 14, 2021**

Questions for Special Envoy for the Northern Triangle Ricardo Zúñiga

1. Will you commit to raising the importance of swiftly nominating ambassadors to each of these countries with President Biden, Vice President Harris, and Secretary Blinken?

Answer:

In conversations with senior administration officials, the Acting Assistant Secretary for Western Hemisphere Affairs and I noted the importance of having confirmed ambassadors in place in Central America as soon as possible to advance U.S. foreign policy goals and strengthen our national security. State Department leadership fully supported that position and prioritized filling vacant ambassadorships in Honduras and El Salvador.

2. What role will ambassadors play in ensuring effective implementation of any strategy to address root causes of migration?

Answer:

As chief of mission, ambassadors have full responsibility for the direction, coordination, and supervision of all executive branch personnel, activities, and operations in the country where they serve, and thus will play a critical role in implementing our strategy for addressing the root causes of irregular migration, as well as lead coordination with host government agencies, private sector employers, and civil society. Ambassadors will be expected to demand from their teams both accountability with respect to taxpayer resources and creativity in identifying new opportunities to put those resources to most effective use.

3. Beyond the top posts, is the Department of State considering expanding its diplomatic presence in Central America for the purposes of facilitating efficient consular processing, addressing the root causes of migration, or other efforts? In what areas is current diplomatic capacity insufficient?

Answer:

The Department of State is continually assessing staffing needs in Central America to ensure we have adequate human resources to address President Biden's top priorities including his Executive Order on a Regional Framework to Manage Migration. WHA missions in Central America and Mexico proposed nine new staff in the bureau's FY 2022 request. The Bureau of Consular Affairs recently approved filling four additional positions in El Salvador, Guatemala, and Honduras. The Bureau for Population, Refugees, and Migration has also deployed a temporary Refugee Coordinator to Guatemala City to oversee refugee resettlement efforts and other PRM programming to support collaborative migration management in the region.

4. From your vantage points at State and USAID, how do criminal financial transactions fuel drug and human trafficking, violence, corruption, and overall instability?

Answer:

Criminal financial transactions and the drive for profits created by these illicit activities fuel drug and human trafficking, violence, corruption, and instability in Central America by weakening the rule of law and rewarding bad actors instead of promoting accountability. Corruption in El Salvador, Guatemala, and Honduras leads to poor governance, undermines democratic institutions, erodes respect for human rights, and hampers economic growth. We are especially concerned by the increasing and corrosive role of drug-related funds in campaign financing in Honduras and Guatemala. These are especially problematic at the local level as traffickers seek control over transit routes and border crossings. We will work with trusted partners to increase their capacity to investigate, prosecute, and punish illicit activities, including criminal financial transactions.

5a. How does State work with Treasury, specifically FinCEN, to address these challenges? Do you think further coordination and resources would be useful to combat the money laundering and corruption that hurts economic opportunity and security in the Northern Triangle, and thus contributes to migration flows?

Answer:

The Department supports continued discussion of methods to enhance information sharing and to address these challenges with its interagency partners, Congress, and industry. Treasury's FinCEN Exchange program brings together law enforcement, financial institutions, and FinCEN in regular briefings – which the Department attends – to facilitate information sharing on cases, typologies, and threats. This initiative helps financial institutions build their systems and algorithms to better identify risks and prioritize targets, which helps achieve our broader shared goal of a strong and effective anti-money laundering regime in Central America.

Information sharing is crucial to law enforcement investigations and prosecutions. Financial institutions are often the first line of defense against money laundering, and the information they collect can ultimately help law enforcement by providing critical leads in existing investigations and spurring new ones. Statutory authority allowing information sharing on a broader range of activity could expand and enhance the information reported to law enforcement and give it greater insight into the financial activities of criminals. That, in turn, would strengthen our efforts to detect and deter criminal activity of all kinds.

5b. Measuring Crime/Insecurity: A recent report from the Wilson Center found that homicide rate is used widely as a proxy for overall crime levels in the Northern Triangle, but it may not be the best measure for how people who are considering migrating experience insecurity. Other crimes—such as extortion, gender-based violence, and kidnapping—might more directly impact the perceptions of insecurity that contribute to people’s desire to migrate.

Answer:

We are concerned about reports of trends in overall crime levels in El Salvador, Guatemala, and Honduras. While we have seen some progress to reduce homicide and kidnapping rates, the continued activity of gangs, transnational criminal organizations (TCOs), systemic gender-based violence, and a culture of impunity continue to hinder progress in reducing perceptions of insecurity.

U.S. assistance programs in El Salvador, Guatemala, and Honduras address improving citizen security generally and the rule of law through capacity building focused on professionalizing institutions and reducing impunity. The United States is committed to working with Central American governments to address the root causes of irregular migration while countering and preventing violence, including gender-based violence, extortion, and other crimes perpetrated by TCOs, traffickers, and gangs.

6. How does insecurity contribute to people’s decision to migrate and are the State Department and USAID considering options to more comprehensively measure insecurity and crime when identifying target communities for U.S.-funded programming?

Answer:

Violence and crime are factors in many individuals’ decisions to migrate and contribute to a lack of hope that conditions will improve to provide a safe and prosperous future for individuals and their families. The State Department and USAID carefully design and target foreign assistance programs to address conditions driving irregular migration to the United States, including crime and violence. As we do so, we are also developing metrics to provide a holistic understanding of the security situation. For instance, while homicide rates have declined dramatically in the region, they still remain high, and we know that far too many Central Americans still feel unsafe in their communities. Extortion remains a major problem and the way many people experience crime and insecurity in Central America. In addition, extremely high domestic violence and femicide rates negatively affect many populations in the region. We will use a data-driven approach as we design and implement our programs to ensure we are reaching communities with higher rates of out migration.

Questions for Acting Assistant Administration Peter Natiello

1. Organized Crime - In 2017, the UN Office on Drugs and Crime estimated gang membership of 64,500 people in the Northern Triangle countries. High rates of poverty and low opportunity puts youth at high risk of joining gangs, willingly or forcibly.

USAID programs intervene through primary prevention programs, creating safe spaces for youth; through secondary prevention programs, with at-risk youth; and through tertiary prevention programs, reintegrating juvenile offenders into society.

Has USAID's approach been effective in lowering gang recruitment? And if so, how do programs like these reduce the need for other costly interventions?

Answer:

- This is an extremely difficult question to answer, as gang numbers are not known exactly (they are just estimates) nor are they able to be monitored on a consistent basis. However, what we can say is that violence stemming from gangs has decreased due to any number of variables interacting, one being that youth are being provided today with more licit alternative pathways than ever in the Northern Triangle. Drawing upon lessons learned in the U.S., we connect community leaders from El Salvador, Honduras, and Guatemala to experts in cities like Los Angeles and Chicago to help strengthen gang rehabilitation efforts and policies in Central America.
- To rehabilitate gang members who are open to it, we work with the UN and local faith-based organizations because we have found that faith-based organizations can have the most success in this area (although we recognize that that success is limited). Even before youth decide to join gangs, we are pioneering the use of screening tools applied by local social workers and NGOs, and we are able to begin to identify youth at greater risk of violent behavior.
- Evidence shows that it is far more cost effective to invest in prevention than suppression. Studies both in the US and the region show that focusing on preventing the highest risk youth from engaging in risky behavior and reducing recidivism of justice-involved youth lead to significant cost saving when factoring in the cost of a single homicide, imprisonment, and lengthy judicial processes.

2. Nefarious Finance/Corruption: In its final report, the Congressionally mandated Western Hemisphere Drug Policy Commission identified the lack of funding and staff at the U.S. Financial Crimes Enforcement Network (FinCEN) within Treasury as an impediment to countering illicit drug trafficking.

From your vantage points at State and USAID, how do criminal financial transactions fuel drug and human trafficking, violence, corruption, and overall instability?

Answer:

- Criminal financial transactions and the drive for profits created by these illicit activities fuel drug and human trafficking, violence, corruption, and instability in Central America by weakening the rule of law and rewarding bad actors instead of promoting accountability.

- Corruption in El Salvador, Guatemala, and Honduras leads to poor governance, undermines democratic institutions, erodes respect for human rights, and hampers economic growth. We are especially concerned by the increasing and corrosive role of drug-related funds in campaign financing in Honduras and Guatemala.
- These are especially problematic at the local level as traffickers seek control over transit routes and border crossings. We will work with trusted partners to increase their capacity to investigate, prosecute, and punish illicit activities, including criminal financial transactions.

How will these programs fit within the administration's larger strategy for addressing root causes of migration?

Answer:

- At the direction of President Biden and in support of his February 2nd Executive Order, USAID is aggressively ramping up programs to address the economic, security, and governance challenges that drive irregular migration from Central America to the United States so that individuals are not forced to make the dangerous journey north.
- Given the President's focus and intent to increase funding to the region, USAID is fully focused on bringing to scale programs to address the drivers of irregular migration.
- Irregular migration is the result of interrelated factors -- including a lack of economic opportunity, insecurity, corruption, governance challenges, and the impact of climate change.
- USAID is targeting our efforts to address these root causes of irregular migration. Specifically, we use data to identify migration hotspots, so that we can scale up and focus programs most directly on would-be migrants from vulnerable places and help returned migrants reintegrate into their communities.
- Finally, per the President's executive order, the Administration is very focused on combating sexual, gender-based, and domestic violence, including through USAID programming.

3. Measuring Crime/Insecurity: A recent report from the Wilson Center found that homicide rate is used widely as a proxy for overall crime levels in the Northern Triangle, but it may not be the best measure for how people who are considering migrating experience insecurity. Other crimes—such as extortion, gender-based violence, and kidnapping—might more directly impact the perceptions of insecurity that contribute to people's desire to migrate. •

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Questions for the Record
From Representative Jacobs to Acting Assistant Administrator Natiello
“Renewing the United States’ Commitment to Addressing to
Root Causes of Migration from Central America”
Wednesday, April 14, 2021

1. Partnership for Growth Model - As we look to develop a new strategy, I think it’s important we learn lessons from past programs, both successful and unsuccessful. I understand that USAID’s Partnership for Growth model enjoyed some success, particularly in El Salvador.

- What are the lessons learned from this model?

Answer:

Partnership for Growth (PfG) was particularly valuable in its use of a Constraints Analysis (CA) as a precursor to strategic planning. The CA helps identify and prioritize the barriers a country faces that impede development. CAs have become more common within USAID, with nearly 40 country-specific analyses using CAs completed since the initial development of PfG. Additionally, the model established parameters for dialogue between the USG and government focused on monitoring, evaluation, and needed programmatic adjustments.

Another lesson learned concerned the need for a balance of quantitative and qualitative metrics, and that in particular, qualitative factors often require a longer time frame to effect measurable change. PfG contributed to achievements like legislative reform, the establishment of fundamental institutions, and the steady growth of accountability mechanisms that have the potential to transform fundamental elements of governance. To fully capture outcomes and impacts, however, future definitions of success should not be restricted to measurements of quantitative effects.

- Does USAID plan on bringing this program back and applying it to other countries in Central America? If so, how?
- How would you update it to address the current circumstances on the ground?

Answer:

While USAID is not currently planning to bring this program back, we remain tightly focused on economic prosperity in the Northern Triangle, the principal focus of the PfG. Specifically, USAID remains focused on creating a better enabling environment for investment, facilitating investment transactions, training youth to be more competitive in the labor market, and partnering with the private sector to expand opportunity. In addition, best practices of the PfG are incorporated into current development programming and will continue without the need for another iteration of the initiative. Such practices include evidence-based decision making, strategies based on informed analysis, buy-in and ownership from development stakeholders, and rigorous monitoring and evaluation.

2. Prioritizing Youth in USAID Strategy - With waves of young people fleeing poverty, violence, and a lack of opportunity in Central America, it is critical that we prioritize the needs of youth at every stage of our development assistance and as we address migration.

- What is USAID’s strategy to support and ‘root’ youth in their home countries?

Answer:

We agree that youth needs must be prioritized, and our policies and Positive Youth Development (PYD) approach reflect our commitments. The 2012 Youth in Development Policy highlights youth engagement as a primary part of the Agency's framework. Specifically, the Policy recommends creating channels for dialogue and participation that enable youth to contribute to their own and their communities' development. Further, the Policy's guiding principles include recognizing youth participation as vital for effective programs.

Given the opportunity and preparation, youth are valuable partners, who can offer insight, guidance, innovative thinking and solutions. They know how to reach other youth in ways that can improve knowledge, shift attitudes, and ultimately change behaviors. By strengthening their socio-emotional and leadership skills, youth participation not only increases their sense of opportunity and contribution, but also promotes a positive view of young people in the wider adult community.

The 2018 Education Policy prioritizes two key areas related to youth social and emotional needs: 1) Children and youth gain literacy, numeracy, and social-emotional skills that are foundational to future learning and success. 2) Youth gain the skills they need to lead productive lives, gain employment, and positively contribute to society. The Policy further states investments should ensure that youth acquire the necessary levels of general education, including literacy, numeracy, and soft skills, in addition to technical skills, such as digital literacy, that prepare them for a lifetime of success.

- How does the agency ensure local actors and nontraditional partners, such as local community-based organizations, are the ones implementing our programs and providing the necessary local know-how required to make measurable progress?

Answer:

USAID considers partnering with, and supporting, local organizations to be a good development practice leading to better and more sustainable development outcomes. USAID funding is primarily awarded competitively to private organizations through contracts, grants, or cooperative agreements. Implementing partners include faith-based and community organizations, the private sector, colleges and universities, public international organizations, and non-profit non-governmental organizations. Some of these agreements are with U.S.-based organizations; others with international organizations; and still others with local organizations. In the case of U.S.-based and international organizations, it is a common practice that these organizations sub-contract or sub-grant to local organizations.

Three key principles guide the way USAID seeks to partner:

- Promote local leadership by working through local actors and systems and engaging our traditional partners in strengthening local capacity.
- Seek bold, creative, and innovative approaches to capitalize on the full marketplace of ideas and solutions by collaborating with partners from all sectors of society.

- Identify new sources of funding to sustain partnerships and scale impact by pursuing partnerships with organizations that can leverage other funding to scale their programs and achieve even greater development outcomes.

3. Prioritizing Youth in USAID Strategy - It would be helpful to understand what lessons prior programs have taught us and, in particular, to understand how the social and emotional needs of youth, ages 15-20, have been considered in the design of project ideas. Some have suggested that interviews with recent migrants to learn more specifically about their situations and needs would be useful when developing new programs. Is the Administration considering this?

Answer:

USAID takes a Positive Youth Development (PYD) approach to engaging with and supporting youth and emerging young leaders in our programming. PYD is defined as engaging youth along with their families, communities and/or governments so that youth are empowered to reach their full potential. PYD approaches build skills, assets, and competencies; foster healthy relationships; strengthen the environment; and transform systems. PYD is based on twenty years of research on what allows young people to thrive and be resilient including in complex environments such as Central America.

A recent example of youth consultation in project design is Youth Excel, implemented by IREX along with ten youth-led and youth-serving organizations, including representatives from Guatemala. During the co-creation process, USAID intentionally elevated the voices of youth participants in the program design. Year 1 activities of Youth Excel in Guatemala were co-designed with youth leaders to identify strategies to address gender-based violence and its effect on women's access to employment. A newly launched grant competition for Central America and the Caribbean seeks concept notes for improving young women's and girls' safety and mobility.

In Honduras, El Salvador and Guatemala, USAID activities have worked to address the social and emotional needs of youth in various ways. In Honduras, the Proponte Mas activity trained Family Counselors to work with youth at-risk of entering gangs and their families to address underlying drivers of violence and instability in their lives, resulting in a dramatic drop in violent or criminal activity. In El Salvador, USAID supported the training of school psychologists and counselors to work with students, their families, and teachers in processing and addressing violence in their communities. In Guatemala, youth learn key soft skills, socio-emotional skills and leadership skills as part of the workforce development and youth leadership activities there.

**Questions for the Record Submitted by
Chairman Albio Sires on behalf of Representative Norma Torres
House Foreign Affairs Committee;
Subcommittee on the Western Hemisphere, Civilian Security, Migration and International
Economic Policy
April 14, 2021**

Questions for Special Envoy for the Northern Triangle Ricardo Zúniga

Question 1:

Will any assistance go to the central governments of Guatemala, Honduras, and El Salvador?

Answer 1:

The Department and USAID provide limited assistance that benefits the central governments of El Salvador, Guatemala, and Honduras for training, advisory and technical support, and equipment related to that training. For example, the security assistance training provided by the Department benefits the governments of these countries. The Department and USAID estimate that approximately 50 percent of FY 2021 planned assistance will benefit the central governments.

Question 2:

How will we ensure the conditions are robust enough to avoid a box-checking exercise that the governments can meet with superficial gestures or later obstruct? Can you give examples of what demonstrations of political will and commitment—particularly in relation to rule of law and democracy—will be satisfactory to the Administration?

Answer 2:

Our strategy to address the root causes of irregular migration will include robust but achievable benchmarks on democratic governance, anticorruption efforts, economic opportunity, and security. Conditionality requirements that track these benchmarks will be helpful as we encourage countries to reform. For example, we intend to set benchmarks to assess the ability of anticorruption prosecution units to reduce corruption.

The Department will need to seek the right balance between conditionality requirements and flexibility to respond to opportunities and challenges as we work to address the root causes of irregular migration. We look forward to working with Congress on this crucial issue.

Question 3:

What are State's requirements for monitoring and reporting to ensure our programs have the desired impact and advance our policy goals?

Answer 3:

The Department and USAID have in place a monitoring and evaluation structure for Central America to assess if programs have the desired impact and advance policy goals. The existing Central America Results Architecture will be updated to assess progress on the Root Causes Strategy (RCS). The Department will build in benchmarks for the RCS to assess our progress and adjust its approach as needed. Wherever possible, we will focus on monitoring outcomes, in addition to activities, to ensure we are making the progress we seek under each program. We will continue to consult with Congress as we update this monitoring and evaluation plan.

Questions for Acting Assistant Administrator Peter Natiello

Question:

Job creation through development - I am glad USAID deployed the Disaster Assistance Response Teams to support the region's recovery from the storms and COVID. We need to ensure as we help them recover, we need to build with the people of the region, not around them.

How does USAID prioritize local hires and diversify its contracting to ensure development provides jobs for and benefits local communities?

Answer:

USAID works closely with multiple stakeholders in the region both in the public and private sectors as well as with civil society organizations and international NGOs. In developing and implementing enduring local solutions to local challenges, USAID generally engages people of the region throughout the life of the program cycle in the following ways:

- Staff at USAID field missions are predominantly host country nationals who's local knowledge and expertise ensure that USAID strategies, programs and projects are relevant to, and effective in, local contexts;
- In designing new activities, USAID regularly employs a practice known as "co-creation" where USAID invites partners, including many local actors, to develop approaches to best address the drivers of irregular migration;
- The vast majority of employees of USAID-funded implementing partners are host country nationals. They are a valued asset who demonstrate unparalleled commitment to their country's development as well as expert capacity in addressing their countries challenges.

Moreover, three key principles guide the way USAID seeks to partner:

- Promote local leadership by working through local actors and systems and engaging our traditional partners in strengthening local capacity
- Seek bold, creative, and innovative approaches to capitalize on the full marketplace of ideas and solutions by collaborating with partners from all sectors of society.
- Identify new sources of funding to sustain partnerships and scale impact by pursuing partnerships with organizations that can leverage other funding to scale their programs and achieve even greater development outcomes.